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THOUGHTS FOR DARK DAYS

H. L. GOUDGE, D.D.,

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THOUGHTS FOR DARK DAYS

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BY THE REV.

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PREFACE.

THE following Sermons are an attempt to apply the Epistle of St. James to our present circumstances. Some of them have been preached in Ely Cathedral; more have been used in a different form at a Retreat for clergy at Helmsley; a few have not been preached at all. It was desired that they should be arranged as a course for Lent, and include sermons for Good Friday and Easter Day. With this desire I have complied, though, as will be seen, with difficulty; but two sermons fall outside the limits of the course. I hope that the title of the book will not be found to have raised hopes that are not realized. If it be otherwise, I would plead that in dark days it is a great mistake to suggest no thoughts but those of comfort. True comfort is part of the harvest of right action, and a teacher like St. James, who is bracing rather than merely comforting, is the teacher whom in dark days we require.

A word may be added as to the view suggested of the destination of the Epistle. I do not know whether it is new; even a bad suggestion may have been made before; and I certainly do not claim that it is altogether satisfactory. But no view known to me appears to be satisfactory.

It is widely recognized that the Epistle must be placed either very early or very late, and the best English expositors adopt the early date. But if we then regard the Epistle as addressed only to Christians, a great difficulty arises. When Luther called it an Epistle of straw he did it great injustice; it is one of the most forcible books of the New Testament. But we must recognize that, if we regard it as written for Christians, Luther's objections are not without point. It is certainly amazing to find one who was the companion of St. Peter and St. John writing an Epistle which contains no satisfactory text either for Good Friday or for Easter Day, and in which, indeed, our Lord's redemptive week is conspicuous by its absence. Equally amazing is it to find him speaking of faith as if its main content were the unity of God, and—with Calvary fresh in his memory—finding no more moving example of patience than the patriarch Job. An explanation is needed, and I have tried to suggest one. Preachers are more likely to accept it than scholars who are not preachers, since the former do, and the latter do not, fall into apparent inconsistency by addressing at the same time more types of men than one. "I think, sir," said a working-man, "that the clergy should address Christians in the morning and the general public in the evening." But there are objections even to this method of approach, and St. James may perhaps have attempted another.

THE COLLEGE, ELY,
November 22nd, 1917.

Thoughts for Dark Days.

SERMON I.

THE EPISTLE OF ST. JAMES.

(Ash Wednesday.)

JAMES I. 1.

"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are of the dispersion, greeting."

So, brethren, begins what is widely believed to be the earliest writing of the New Testament. Two things the writer tells us about himself: he is a servant of God, and he is a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. From his earliest years, we may well believe, he had been a servant of God, a deeply conscientious Jew, "walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless."[1] But a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ he had not always been. St. James was one of our Lord's brethren, and there was a time, we know, when "even His brethren did not believe on Him."[2] That time, happily, is now past. God, St. James knows, has made Jesus "both Lord and Christ,"[3] and henceforward every servant of God must be a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ also. Thus

[1] Luke i. 6. [2] John vii. 5. [3] Acts ii. 36.

it is as the servant of Both that he writes to the twelve tribes of the dispersion, the whole body of the Jewish people scattered throughout the world. The servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ has a message for them all.

I.

We will think this Lent of the Epistle of St. James, and of the message which it has for us in these dark days through which we are passing. St. James makes a special appeal to all Englishmen who desire to live their lives aright. "East is East and West is West" we know, and no Oriental will entirely resemble an Englishman. But St. James has more in common with us than other writers of the New Testament; he speaks to us at times almost in the accents of a good English working-man. He has the practical outlook of the Englishman. He is not a great reasoner like St. Paul, or a great mystic like St. Paul or St. John; he does not write as if he possessed that deep, emotional love for our Lord which characterized alike St. Paul, St. John, and St. Peter, though, if to have our Lord's commandments and to keep them be to love our Lord,[1] perhaps no one ever loved Him better than St. James did. It is right conduct for which St. James cares. He cannot endure talk without action, listening without practical response; he has no belief in a faith which does not express itself in works, or in any so-called

[1] John xiv. 21.

"religion" of which charity and purity are not integral parts. We English people are with him there—in theory, at any rate. If there is one writer of the New Testament more than another to whom we all are naturally disposed to listen it is St. James. Moreover, of all the writers of the New Testament, St. James is perhaps most suitable for our study in Lent. His practical outlook makes him a great preacher of repentance, and Lent should be a time of repentance for us all. It is not a time for those deeper truths of our faith, into which we cannot enter till we have made some progress in the spiritual life;[1] rather it is a time for looking to our foundations. Have we not felt that to-day the words of the Old Testament came home to us with even greater power than the words of the New? The "Epistle" from the prophet Joel meant more to us than the Gospel, and the First Lesson than the Second, just because they were originally addressed to those who were not Christians at all, and we to-day are not thinking so much of our Christianity as of our want of it. Now, no writer of the New Testament is so like an Old Testament prophet as St. James is, or calls us to repentance with such power and directness as he. That is why we should especially attend to him. We shall not find that words, which seem to forget that we are Christians, are necessarily inappropriate to us. It is only too possible for us to have fallen back below the level of the best Israelites, who lived before our Lord's coming.

[1] Cf. 1 Cor. ii. 14—iii. 3.

II.

But now to-day let us think a little of St. James himself, and of the reasons why he writes as he does. Many of his words will be unintelligible unless we do so. How is it that one who was not even a member of the apostolic band is found writing with such authority, not only to Christian Jews, but to the whole of his people scattered throughout the world? That St. James had a great position in the Early Church we know not only from the New Testament, but from other sources also. How was this? No doubt his character gave him great influence, but still more important, probably, was his relationship to our Lord. Remember that the first Christians thought of our Lord mainly as the Messianic King. God, by glorifying our Lord through His Resurrection and Ascension, had made Him King over the whole people of God. The old prophecy made to David's line was fulfilled in Him.[1] True, the King was for the moment out of sight; He had ascended into heaven. But very soon they believed He would return to establish the kingdom of God, and to reign over it for ever. Meanwhile, who so naturally represented Him as His eldest brother, St. James? St. Peter and St. John might be the great preachers and workers of miracles, as the prophets had been in Old Testament days. But the kingdom belonged to the sons of David; and while the true King was out of sight, His brother might well seem to Jewish Christians the right person to take His place.

[1] 2 Sam. vii. 8–16; Jer. xxx. 9, etc.

But how about the Jews who were not Christians? Here, too, the character of St. James would account for much. He was "James the Just," well known for his strict observance of the law, and for his ascetic life.[1] But here, too, his parentage might well count for much. Even Jews, who were not yet Christians, looked for a king to arise from the family of David, and St. James was probably the oldest member of the royal house. Now, we may not ourselves think that the importance thus attached to St. James was rightly attached to him. St. Paul would certainly not have considered such a relationship to our Lord as of any great importance, and it may be that St. James did not so consider it himself. But if you know that your words have weight, your duty in a day of crisis is to make the best use of your influence, and it was indeed a day of crisis in which St. James wrote. The fate of the whole Jewish people was trembling in the balance. The greatest crime in the history of the world had been committed by them—the Lord Jesus Christ had been crucified—and judgment was ready to fall. "Ye have condemned, ye have killed the Righteous One," says St. James; "is He not in array against you?"[2] More than this, there had been no repentance. Christian evangelists were going everywhere "preaching the word"[3] to the Jews of the Dispersion, but the Jews were not at all disposed to "receive with meekness the implanted word, which "was" able to save "their souls." They were not "swift to

[1] Cf. Eusebius H. E. ii. 23.
[2] Ch. v. 6 for the translation here adopted of Sermon VIII.
[3] Acts viii. 4; xi. 19.

hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath."[1] They were, on the contrary, as St. Paul found later on, slow to listen to the gospel, swift to interrupt before it had been fully preached to them, swift to be angry at anything which came into conflict with their preconceived ideas and their national pride. Moreover, everywhere the old evils are rife. There was the old boasting of their knowledge of the law, joined to a sad absence of the "wisdom that cometh down from above";[2] there was the old love of money, the old "bitter jealousy and faction,"[3] the old double-mindedness[4] which had called down the Lord's anger upon the "adulterous and selfish generation"[5] among which He lived. The rich were still abusing their power, and treating the poor with cruel injustice.[6] So St. James, in the spirit of an Old Testament prophet, writes to say that "the Judge standeth before the doors,"[7] that those who are feasting are feasting "in a day of slaughter,"[8] and that the rich will pass away "as the flower of the grass."[9] St. James does write for Christian Jews; here and there his words apply to them only. But he writes, it would seem, also to the whole body of his people, not concealing his own Christian faith, but so speaking that his word may go home even to those who do not share it. This is how we may explain the facts that the Epistle contains so little doctrine that is distinctively Christian, and that St. James refers for his examples rather to the great characters of the Old

[1] Ch. i. 19–21. [2] Ch. iii. 15. [3] Ch. iii. 14. [4] Ch. iv. 4, 8.
[5] Mark viii. 38. [6] Ch. ii. 6; v. 1 ff. [7] Ch. v. 9.
[8] Ch. v. 5. [9] Ch. i. 10.

Testament than to the Lord Himself. The Lord was a far higher example of patience than Job, and of the power of prayer than Elijah; we cannot suppose that St. James did not know it; but he did not write for Christians only, and thus he so spoke that all might hear.

III.

My brethren, it is just such a teacher as this that we need to-day. We, too, live in a day of national crisis. The sky is dark over us as it was dark over Israel then, and we know not what the future may have in store. We, too, find Christians and non-Christians strangely mingled, bearing the same trials, and facing the same dangers. If, in the days of St. James, the Jewish Church had hardly yet had time to disentangle itself from the main body of the nation, the English Church is for many reasons hardly more distinct from the English people to-day. Our Christianity is diffused rather than concentrated, and when we make our appeals to those around us we scarcely know whether to address them as Christians or not. Many hardly know themselves how they stand to Jesus Christ. How, then, shall we speak? We must not forget that we are servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as servants of God, but common trials and common dangers draw us all together, and Christians have much in common with all who have faith in God and desires after better things. Surely the Church in this coming Lent should have

a message for all. There is the Gospel, as ever, to proclaim to "them that are without";[1] there is truth to declare that only convinced Christians will be able to hear; but there is much also at such a time as this which needs to be said to all men of good will, and St. James may help us to see what it is. He has a message for the suffering, who understand not the purpose of their suffering; a message for the perplexed, who see no way out of their perplexity; a message for those losing their patience under long, continued strain; a message for the rich and for the poor, for the teacher and for the taught. Above all, as we have seen, he has a Lenten message. He calls us from half-heartedness in religion to reality, from talk to action, from a faith without works to a faith expressed in Christian living, from a wisdom of this world to heavenly wisdom, from selfish, useless prayers to the supplication of the righteous, which "availeth much in its working."[2] We will listen to him then, Sunday by Sunday, and listen in the way that he himself demands, resolving to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding our own selves."[3]

[1] Cor. v. 12. [2] Ch. v. 16. [3] Ch. ii. 22.

SERMON II.

TRIAL AND TEMPTATION.

(First Sunday in Lent.)

JAMES I. 2–4.

"Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye shall fall into manifold temptations; knowing that the proof of your faith worketh patience. And let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing."

WE thought last Wednesday of St. James himself, and of our hope to gain from him real help in our present difficulties. To-day we shall begin to put him to the test. His first word is about our trials and temptations, and a brave word it is. We are, he says, to count it nothing but joy when we fall into them, since it is their office to test our faith and strengthen our characters. A great prize is within our reach, and steadfast endurance is the one way to gain it. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to them that love Him."[1]

I.

Now, my brethren, it may well be that, as these words fall upon our ears, a sense of weariness

[1] Ch. i. 12.

descends upon us. "Oh! yes," we say; "it is the old thing, that we have heard a thousand times. It is all sent for some wise purpose, it is all for our good. It will all be made up to us in heaven. But that kind of talk does not help us at all, for it does not square with the facts. Only think of the horrors of the last three years. How can we believe that God has sent them with some wise purpose? What good have they done or can they possibly do, which is not far more than outweighed by the evil? It is not the mere suffering which so appals us, awful as that may be. It is the moral evils that these horrors bring—the loss of old ideals, the letting loose of the vilest passions, the wide brutalization, the sheer atheism which the whole outlook seems almost to justify. In view of the facts, the facile optimism of St. James does not help us at all; it simply irritates. If he has nothing more to say than this, it is useless to listen to him." Well, St. James has a great deal more to say than this; but the first thing for us to notice is that what we blame him for saying he does not say. He does not say that our trials are sent by God; on the contrary, as we shall see, he denies it. He does not say that they are good things; he says that they are evil things. He does not say that they will necessarily do good to any soul that God has made; all that depends upon how we deal with them. What he says is that trials of all kinds afford us a magnificent opportunity, and that the right use of them is the path to perfection. We need not, then, be at all afraid that St. James is going to weary us with religious platitudes. He

is much more likely to startle us by the contrariety of his teaching to our established beliefs. We will try, by the comparison of this and other passages in his Epistle, to grasp his view as a whole, and see how it corresponds to and illuminates our experience.

II.

But, before turning to this, there is an explanation which it may be necessary to give. We are to think of trials and temptations, while it may seem that St. James speaks of temptations only. But in the language in which St. James writes the same word is used for both trials and temptations, and St. James himself does not distinguish between them. Moreover, he is not alone in this; the writers of the Bible, as a body, are with him. We ourselves are accustomed to distinguish carefully between trials and temptations; we say that trials come from God and temptation from the devil. But in Scripture we find a different view. In early Hebrew thought the devil does not appear; all that takes place is ascribed directly to God. Thus we heard in our First Lesson to-night that "God did tempt Abraham,"[1] and we find it written that God "moved David against" Israel, and told him to number Israel, thus bringing about the very sin for which David and his people afterwards suffered.[2] In later Hebrew thought all this is changed. As soon as belief in a personal being,

[1] Gen. xxii. 1. [2] 2 Sam. xxiv. 1

who tempts to evil, is established, temptation is no longer ascribed to God. The author of the Books of Chronicles corrects the statement of the Second Book of Samuel as to the numbering of Israel ;[1] he believes with St. James that God "tempteth no man."[2] Not only so, but you will find that according to the later view trials as well as temptations come from Satan. Our Lord speaks of the poor woman whom He heals as one whom "Satan" has "bound, lo, these eighteen years,"[3] and St. Paul of his "thorn in the flesh" as "a messenger of Satan to buffet" him.[4] That God's providence is over all that takes place is in no way denied—that is the truth to which the earlier view bears witness. Even Satan subserves God's purposes, and "all things" without exception "work together for good to them that love God."[5] But trials and temptations alike proceed from an evil will that is not God's. Moreover, you will find in your own experience that no hard and fast line can be drawn between trial and temptation. Did you ever know a trial that was not also a source of temptation, or a temptation which was not also a source of trial? We must then remember, as we read the first chapter of St. James's Epistle, that the word temptation includes trial of all kinds, and that we shall best understand his meaning if we think of the two together.

How, then, shall we proceed? Shall we begin with our trials and temptations and from them ascend to God, or shall we forget ourselves for the

[1] 1 Chron. xxi. 1. [2] Ch. i. 13. [3] Luke xiii. 16.
[4] 2 Cor. xii. 7; cf. 1 Thess. ii. 18. [5] Rom. viii. 28.

moment and begin with God? Surely it will be best to begin high up. How does St. James think of God, and what has he to tell us about Him?

It is a summer night, and we go out with St. James of Jerusalem and stand with him upon the Mount of Olives. Above us are the stars, shining in that clear atmosphere with a brilliance unknown to us here. How beautiful they are! How calm! How unchanging! What a contrast they present to the sordid and turbulent life of that old city across the Kidron! Yes, indeed, "the heavens declare the glory of God" to-night.[1] He is "the Father of lights,"[2] the Creator of the heavenly bodies, beautiful, calm, unchanging as they. But no—that is too little to say. The stars do vary in the light they give, while the sun and the moon vary greatly. We cannot always see the moon; the side that reflects the light of the sun is often turned away from us. There is nothing like that in God. He is "the Father of lights, with Whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning."[3] What, then, are we to say of Him? Can He Himself be tried and tempted by the evils from which we suffer? Can it be He that tries and tempts you and me? Away with such thoughts! "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted" or tried "by evils, and He Himself tempteth no man."[4] No doubt it is easy to think

[1] Ps. xix. 1. [2] Ch. i. 17. [3] Ch. i. 17.

[4] Ch. i. 13; cf. R.V. margin. The translators both of the A.V. and the R.V. alter "evils" into "evil" without any warrant, thus narrowing the meaning of the words. Apparently they supposed only moral evil to be in view.

otherwise; the early Hebrews continually did so. But "be not deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect boon is from above, coming down from the Father of lights"[1]—yes, the good and perfect, and they alone. Brethren, let us grasp this as firmly as St. James would have us grasp it. The transcendence of God is a fundamental principle of Christian faith. He is "ever active, but ever at rest."[2] Though He enters with infinite sympathy into our trials and limitations, He is Himself above and beyond them. How it calms us to remember that! The finite God of Mr. Wells is no God at all.[3]

> "I smiled to think God's greatness
> Flowed around our incompleteness,
> Round our restlessness His rest."[4]

And the goodness of God and of all that comes from Him—that is a fundamental principle also. We must never say of a real evil that God has sent it.

"But, then," we say, "if this be so, why are our trials and temptations what they are? To put them down to Satan is no real answer to our difficulty. Why has he the power that he has?" And St. James answers: "Consult your own experience." The origin of evil is a great mystery. But suffering is largely the consequence of moral evil or sin, and the great torrent of moral evil which surges through the world is ever being fed by the tributary

[1] Ch. i. 16, 17. [2] St. Augustine, "Confessions," Bk. I., ch. iv.
[3] The reference is to "Mr. Britling sees it through," and to "God the Invisible King."
[4] E. B. Browning, "Rhyme of the Duchess May."

streams which arise in our own breasts. "From within, out of the heart of men," says our Lord, "evil thoughts proceed, fornications, thefts, murders,"[1] all the black catalogue of sins. Yes! if you want to know whence evil arises, look within. All that in this world you will ever learn of the origin of evil your own heart will tell you. Observe what actually takes place: "Each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed."[2] Yes! his own lust, his very own. Each man, by inheritance, by temperament, above all by past yielding to sin, has his own characteristic irregular desire. It draws him away; it entices him by the offer of a pleasure within his reach. Is there sin yet? No, not yet—only trial and temptation, which we may count nothing but joy. Sin only arises when the will yields itself to the irregular desire; for the sin we are ourselves responsible. The desire is the mother that bears the sin, but the will is the father. Why did we yield? Oh! why? But this is not all. Sin, that misshapen child of the will, grows, and she, too, in time becomes a mother. "The lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin; and the sin, when it is full-grown bringeth forth death"[3]—death to joy, death to peace, death to all which makes life to be life indeed. We never expected it—the word used to describe this second birth suggests a birth by miracle. We never expected it, but so it is, and the responsibility is our own. What has the Father of lights to do with it?

[1] Mark vii. 21. [2] Ch. i. 14. [3] Ch. i. 15.

"But, then," we answer, "it is not these personal matters which trouble us. They, indeed, may be as St. James says. But we are thinking to-day of greater things—of the long-drawn agony of the war, of the ruin of nations, of the loss of our best. And again St. James turns upon us. What has the Father of lights to do with all this, either? "Whence come wars and whence come fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and covet, and cannot obtain. Ye fight and war."[1] Oh! the ghastly muddle of it all! St. James falls into bathos and mere repetition of his words, because the whole situation is reeking with bathos and the vainest of vain repetition. What answer have we to make to him? What causes war except national selfishness, national pride, national vainglory, national greed? What continues it, in spite of the awfulness of our experience? What but this, that nations, as well as individuals, are drawn away by their own characteristic national lusts, and yield their national wills, instead of refusing to yield them. Then the lust, when it has conceived, bears sin, and the sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. It is indeed a monstrous birth. Who, a few years back, would have believed that the sin of the nations of Christendom could bring forth death on this appalling scale? But whose fault is it, if not our own? The good gifts of national genius and organizing power, the perfect boons of growing knowledge and industrial development—

[1] Ch. iv. 1, 2.

the Father of lights has given us all these. From whom comes the hideous use we have made of them, and still must make? The Father of lights made and left us free, no doubt; if we were to be more than machines, He could not have done otherwise. Is He to be blamed for the use we have made of our freedom? Are we to say that He has "sent" this agony, when He has ceaselessly warned us against every one of the sins which have brought it about? Not so, says St. James, or that old writer Ecclesiasticus, whom he has so often in his mind. "Say not thou: It is through the Lord that I fell away; for thou shalt not do the things that He hateth. Say not thou, It is He that caused me to err; for He hath no need of a sinful man. . . He hath not commanded any man to be ungodly; and He hath not given any man license to sin."[1]

III.

Brethren, that is the first truth for us to grasp this Lent—our own responsibility. How continually we forget it, or slur it over! How continually we lay at the door of God the evils which we have brought upon ourselves by our own disobedience to His laws! Let us look facts in the face. We are responsible individually for our own sins; they have been by our fault, by our own fault, by our own most grievous fault. We are responsible collectively for the sins of our nation and of all the nations. Little as Great Britain is

[1] Ecclus. xv. 11, 12, 20.

immediately to blame for the present war, it has had its share in producing that atmosphere of mutual envy, suspicion, and hatred out of which the war has so largely sprung. We are sharing in the punishment because we have shared in the sin. We must repent this Lent for all our yielding of our wills to our own lusts, and for our share in the national yielding of the national will, and we must find out, each for himself, where our sin has chiefly lain, that we may indeed repent of it. We have not been tempted of God; we have been drawn away and enticed, and yielded to the enticements. We must repent. No good can come to us until we have done so. But are our trials and temptations only the punishment of the past, to be borne with patience because we have deserved them? Certainly not. For here lies the marvel of the divine government, that those very evils which our sins have brought upon us may yet be the means of training our characters for eternity. That is why—by a deliberate effort of the will—we are to count it nothing but joy that we have fallen into them. God has not sent them; they are in themselves evils; but, though they are evils, they afford us a magnificent opportunity of good. Trial is the school of character; there is no other school. The greater the trials and the temptations that we endure, the greater our spiritual growth. If our best soldiers are growing as we do not grow, it is because they are enduring as we do not endure. But we also must endure, and that to the uttermost. "Let patience have its perfect work"; shrink from nothing that is asked of

you, that you may miss nothing of the blessing that is put within your reach. So will your ship at last come home to port, not, as our strange hymn says:

> "Rent cordage, shatter'd deck
> Torn sails, provisions short,
> And only not a wreck."

No! it will come home with every cable taut, and every timber sound, with every sail set to the wind of the Holy Spirit, and the heavenly food sufficient for the last day, as it has been sufficient for all the days that have gone before it. We shall come home, just as St. James says: "perfect and entire, lacking in nothing," that being "approved," we may "receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to them that love Him."

SERMON III.

PERPLEXITY.

(Second Sunday in Lent.)

JAMES I. 5–8.

"But if any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God, Who giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting: for he that doubteth is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord; a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

THESE words, brethren, are very characteristic of St. James. He has spoken to us of trial and temptation; to-day he will speak to us of perplexity. But, though the subject is changed, the spirit is the same. There is the same strong grasp of the character of God; the same cheerfulness and common sense in the advice given; and the same bracing sternness towards the evil in ourselves, which threatens to make the goodness of God of no avail for us. We all lack wisdom, do we not? St. James will show us the way to obtain it.

I.

What then, quite briefly, is St. James's teaching? Dark days, such as those through which we are

passing, bring to us not only trial, but perplexity. It is not enough just to endure. Decisions have to be made in our own lives, and in the life of the nation and of the Church; and it is hard to know what to do for the best. Well! St. James seems to say, and what of it? If you find yourself lacking wisdom, go to God and ask for it. Ask in faith, as the Master told you to ask. "Verily, I say unto you, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he saith cometh to pass, he shall have it. Therefore, I say unto you, All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them."[1] Yes, "nothing doubting" —the secret lies there. The doubter gets nothing. And why not? Because want of faith in prayer is generally the sign of a divided heart. "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways"; he wavers in prayer as he wavers everywhere else. He hardly knows what he wants; he has no simplicity of faith; and so he receives absolutely nothing. Very plain teaching this, but very necessary. Let us look at St. James's words more in detail, and try to enter into the fullness of their meaning.

II.

Now to-day, just as a week ago, we will begin with God. We are to go to Him in prayer, and we need something to give us confidence.

[1] Mark xi. 23, 24

St. James, as he did last Sunday, institutes a comparison. He compares and contrasts the greatness and simplicity of God's generosity with the spirit in which we ourselves too often give. How do we give, when we give at all? Always we must improve the occasion. The poor relation comes to us in his difficulties, and we will not give in a simple and brotherly way; we must preach a scarifying sermon at the same time. It falls, as sermons are apt to do, into three parts. Firstly, we deal scathingly with the poor relation's past; secondly, we indulge in dark prognostications about his future; and thirdly, by way of practical conclusion we say that though we help him this time, never, under any circumstances, is he to ask our help again. Shall we turn to Ecclesiasticus to describe the situation? "The gift of a fool shall not profit thee. . . . He will give little and upbraid much, and he will open his mouth like a crier."[1] Do we urge that it is necessary to bring the man to a sense of his past follies? He is probably quite sensible of them already. He knows them, and knows that we know them. The humiliation of having to appeal to us brings them all to his mind. If we spoke kindly and gave with simplicity, he might think of them all the more. But our cruelty destroys his self-condemnation. In face of our injustice his conscience changes sides; it condemns us, and almost acquits him. He is sure that he is not so bad as we have painted him, and feels now that he is more sinned against than sinning. As far as we were able, we have destroyed both his

[1] Ecclus. xx. 14, 15.

penitence for the past and his hope for the future. How different is God's way! He "gives to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." Are these words just an example of the way in which we rightly ascribe all good to God, or are they the verdict of experience? The latter, certainly. We think not just now of the freedom of God's gifts in nature, of the love of the Father in heaven, Who "maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust."[1] Ask those who, whether by confession and absolution, or in some other way, have been assured of the Divine forgiveness. They will tell you that God does not upbraid, and that it is the very fact that He does not which makes their penitence the deeper. The past—that is swept away. God has "cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."[2] The future—that is altogether bright, for the God of forgiveness will be with them in it. And, though indeed God says "Go and sin no more,"[3] there is no "never again." God helping them, they never will need forgiveness in the future as they have in the past; but, if they fall, they will arise and go to their Father. They are truly sorry for their sin, and it is the eloquence of God's refusal to upbraid them which has helped to make them so. Brethren, do you know yet this wonderful characteristic of your Father in heaven? If not, by repentance and confession give to Him the opportunity of displaying it.

But, now, if it be so with God, why do we complain of not seeing our way? If we may ask for

[1] Matt. v. 45. [2] Mic. vii. 19. [3] John v. 14.

forgiveness with such confidence that we shall be heard, surely we may ask for wisdom. Forgiveness is a miracle ; it means the undoing of the past ; but the gift of wisdom is no miracle at all. Our perplexities may be partly of our own making, but they are far from being altogether so. We are not, for example, as individuals responsible for the war, and for all the money difficulties which it has brought upon us. If we do not know where to turn, surely it is not much to ask that God out of His infinite stores of wisdom should give to us sufficient for our need. Why, then, do we find ourselves doubting as we pray for wisdom instead of asking and receiving that our "joy may be full"?[1] It is because of that divided heart that wavers everywhere. "He that doubteth is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed." Do we Englishmen, with our island love of the sea, think that a strange comparison? The Jews had no love of the sea, and they recognized the truth about it. The sea is so destructive, and so incalculable in its destructiveness, not because it is so strong, but because it is so weak. The good substantial earth—*terra firma*, as we call it—knows how to hold its own ; the moon and the winds affect it not at all. But the sea is at the mercy of every influence, ever in motion, and yet never making any substantial progress. The tide comes in, and the tide goes out. The waves hurl themselves upon the rocks with a resounding clangour, and retire beaten into foam and spray. What a picture of the double-minded man, un-

[1] John xvi. 24.

stable in all his ways! What a picture, it may be, of you and of me! The purposes of the double-minded are like the tide; their prayers are like the driven spray. Will God hear their prayers? How should God hear them? "Ye adulteresses"—St. James means that the heart is unfaithful to God the true husband—"know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world"—St. James speaks surely of a settled policy, not of a passing desire—"maketh himself an enemy of God. Or think ye that the Scripture speaketh in vain? He yearneth even unto jealousy for the spirit which He made to dwell in us."[1] Now we have the explanation. God is the Divine Lover, the "Hound of Heaven," as Francis Thompson calls Him, who ever seeks the single-hearted love of the spirit which He made to dwell in each one of us; the divided heart He cannot endure. Will He give us wisdom? Wisdom for what? Wisdom to find Him, wisdom to cleave to Him, wisdom to walk with Him in the paths of His commandments? A thousand times yes. But wisdom to win the world, wisdom to cleave to the world, wisdom to buy and sell and get gain, that we may spend it on our lusts?[2] A thousand times no. The world is God's rival. Do you expect a husband to provide a wife with funds that she may go away with her lover? Do we desire true wisdom?—that is the question. Suppose that we had no doubt at

[1] Ch. iv. 4, 5. The difficult fifth verse seems to be there best translated. The Book of Hosea may be in St. James's mind.
[2] Ch. iv. 3.

all as to the power of prayer. Suppose that we knew with certainty that if we asked God for wisdom, He would show us, so that we could have no shadow of doubt, every detail of what He asked of us. Should we have the courage and faithfulness to ask for wisdom, or would we rather not see God's will too clearly, for fear He should ask too much?

> "Though I knew His love Who followèd,
> Yet was I sore adread
> Lest, having Him, I must have naught beside."[1]

III.

You see, then, St. James's teaching. There is no reason to be unhappy over our perplexities. All the wisdom we need is within our reach, and we have only to ask for it. But we must get rid of the double-mind first. "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded."[2] Yes! purify them; God will not purify them without you. Is it hard? Yes, very hard. The greatest difficulty of the religious life lies just there. But if we are willing to try, we shall find that we are not alone in the struggle. So it is that the moment after St. James has said that God yearns ever unto jealousy for the spirit which He made to dwell within us, he adds: "But He giveth more grace. . . God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble."[3] If we really

[1] Francis Thompson, "The Hound of Heaven." [2] Ch. iv. 8. [3] Ch. iv. 6.

desire to purify our hearts, God will help us to do so. Your soul, in the tumult of its passions and desires, may be "like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed." Nay! it may even be in worse case than that; it may be like that "troubled sea" of which Isaiah speaks: "It cannot rest and its waters cast up mire and dirt."[1] But far down beneath that "you" there is a deeper "you," the spirit that God made to dwell within "you," and even in the sea the depths are calm. Go down to that deeper "you," and in it cast yourself upon God, Who yearns for it even unto jealousy.

> "Just as I am, though toss'd about
> With many a conflict, many a doubt.
> Fightings and fears within, without."
>
> "Just as I am, of that free love,
> The breadth, length, depth, and height to prove."

Yes, that free love, the love of God, "Who giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not." "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you."[2] He will win our hearts, if we give Him the chance of winning them. He will unite our "hearts to fear His name."[3] And with purity will come the power to pray, and with believing prayer the gift of wisdom, and—perhaps for the first time in our lives—we shall see our course laid clearly out before us.

[1] Isa. lvii. 20. [2] Ch. iv. 8. [3] Ps. lxxxvi. 11.

SERMON IV.

POOR AND RICH.

(Third Sunday in Lent.)

JAMES I. 9–11.

"Let the brother of low degree glory in his high estate: and the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun ariseth with the scorching wind, and withereth the grass; and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his goings."

THERE is, as we read these verses in the Revised Version, one word which arrests our attention. It is the word "glory." "Let the brother of low degree glory in his high estate; and the rich in that he is made low." Joy and confidence St. James has asked of us before, but glorying is more than either. To glory is to be so delighted with something which belongs to us that we cannot keep our delight to ourselves. Is that bad manners? So we English people may be inclined to think. But St. James does not think so, nor St. Paul either—glorying is a great word with St. Paul. The truth is that glorying is only offensive when it is a form of pride. Give a little child a present which delights him. If he glories in it and must

speak of it and show it to everybody, you are surely the better pleased. So it is with the glorying of a Christian. There is no pride, for he knows from Whom every good gift comes. It is but the natural and right result of overwhelming joy.

I.

It is a beautiful subject which comes before us to-day—the levelling power of Christianity, and the exultation which it should excite in rich and poor alike. Do we say rich and poor? That is the accustomed phrase. But St. James would say poor and rich. St. James is a Christian, and, like His Master, he puts the poor first. Slowly, but, I hope, surely, to-day we are coming to do the same. The poor are many, while the rich are few. It is the poor to whom the kingdom of heaven especially belongs, while hardly indeed do the rich enter into it. But the gospel is a great leveller. "He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek." Moreover, the levelling once accomplished, it is found to be a blessing for both. It is only when the mighty have come down from their seats that they discover how uncomfortable their seats were, and how great are the blessings now within their reach, which were before altogether beyond it. Our Lord was a lover of the poor, but He was not on that account a hater of the rich; He spoke of them not so much with anger as with pity. He did not envy them for what they had; he pitied them

for the far higher things that they were so unfortunate as to be missing. Let us consider both sides of St. James's teaching. Never, perhaps, have we needed them more than we need them to-day.

II.

Let us consider, firstly, the case of the poor. By the poor we shall, of course, mean not the working classes as such, for many of them are not at all poor, but all, of whatsoever class, who have little or no margin of money that they can spend as they will, and to whom the future for themselves and for those dependent upon them is to the human eye dark and insecure. Great numbers of the professional classes, as well as of the labouring classes, belong to-day, for good as well as for evil, to the ranks of the poor. If, though the fact is unknown to others, poverty is our own lot, so also is our Lord's benediction upon it: "Let the brother of low degree glory in his high estate." How does our faith exalt the poor? Not necessarily in this world's goods, or in this world's reckoning. True Christian faith brings all virtues in its train, and such virtues as industry, temperance, chastity, faithfulness, work directly for prosperity even here. But there are other virtues brought by faith which may interfere with worldly success and advancement —virtues such as scrupulous honesty and truth, and a mind set upon higher things. From the point of view of this world's gain, the gilt-edged security is "Be not righteous overmuch; be not overmuch

wicked: "[1] Christian thoroughness is at best a speculative investment. In St. James's day it was hardly as much as that; slaves who became Christians remained slaves still. But what is it that depresses the poor in all classes? Not so much poverty, unless it be grinding poverty, as the sense of insignificance, the sense that their views are not considered, and their needs altogether disregarded by those who have the management of affairs. "Then, said I, wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless, the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard."[2] What is it that in the past year has driven the poor of East London to the verge of revolution? Not the German bombs in themselves, but the belief—quite without foundation, we may hope—that their sufferings are disregarded, and that the people further west, who have cellars into which to retreat, do not concern themselves with the east. Now it is just this desolating sense of insignificance which the gospel removes. It says, not merely that the Son of God was born in a stable, but also that He chose so to be born—not only that He worked at the carpenter's bench, but that He chose so to work. That in itself brings a great lift, but that is not all. "Hearken, my beloved brethren," says St. James. "Did not God choose them that are poor as to the world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to them that love Him?"[3] Observe the exact point. It is not just that the poor are heirs of the kingdom, though that is much. The heir can be patient, since his

[1] Eccles. vii. 16, 17. [2] Eccles. ix. 16. [3] Ch. ii. 5

future is assured. It is that God Himself has chosen them to be heirs of the kingdom, that, instead of being disregarded, He has singled them out for the greatest of His blessings. Does such a thought bring a danger of pride? Certainly it does. Let us hear St. Paul: "Let as many as are servants under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and the doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren." Such words are significant; they would not have been used had they not been necessary. But the very fact that they were necessary proves how real the "high estate" given to the poor actually is. They are perfectly right to exult in it. If to-day no such result follows the preaching of the gospel, it is probably because neither the kingdom of the future nor the divine election of the poor has its right place in our teaching.

But, then, what of the rich? "Let the rich exult in that he is made low." Is that cant? Not at all. St. James does not say that such exultation necessarily follows; it is something to which the rich need to be exhorted. But it ought not to be beyond their power. The rich man, who loves and clings to his riches, is always fearing that they will pass away. Well he knows that he is as the flower of the grass—not like the grass itself, for that, though it may be withered, springs up afresh after the first steady rain—but like the flower of grass, that falls and disappears for ever. That is why the rich man, who is neither a Christian nor

a patriot, is so peculiarly unhappy to-day. The sun of the war is withering him by supertax and high prices. As he says, with a somewhat misplaced humility, he is "worth" nothing like what he was. He looks out on the political horizon and there he sees, or thinks he sees, the approach of the sirocco of revolution, which will sweep away what is left to him. Far more unhappy, therefore, than "the poor man at his gate," he wanders about to talk pessimism with other rich men about the war and the working-classes. What can the gospel do for him? Nothing at all, unless he accepts it; it is not the business of the Christian Church to stave off revolution. But if only he will himself receive the message of the gospel, his misery will pass away. Certainly it will bring him low. He will find that before God, and to a great extent before men, he stands where the poor stand. His morbid pleasure in his fancied superiority will altogether pass away. But, as he comes down from his seat, the humble and meek will meet him as they rise. Henceforth they will go forward together. He will have lost his lonely eminence to find the brotherhood of his fellow-men. Loneliness and separation always mean gloom. The working-classes are gayer than the wealthy, not only because they take less thought for the morrow, but because their lives are passed in the company of their fellows. It is a great blessing to the rich to be quit of their loneliness. Moreover, the rich man, once a Christian, like the poor man, will find himself a child of God, an heir of the kingdom, and will care far less whether he loses his wealth or

not. If it stays, he will do his best with it for the common good; if the sirocco sweeps it away, let it go.

III.

My brothers, is not this a message for dark days? All peace of mind just now depends upon our learning the lesson. Is it beyond our power to learn it? It has not been so in the past. Let us consider the example of two rich men brought low—one in the story of the Old Testament, the other in that of the New. Naaman, the Syrian, is an example of the rich man, not at his worst but at his best. If he is proud, it is with a pride that is only skin-deep; like so many great soldiers, he has the heart of a child. How beautiful it is to see how he has won the heart of the little maid from the land of Israel. Captive though she be, her one desire is to help him. How delightful is the attitude of all his servants towards him! Which of us could with equal freedom be rebuked by our servants, however unusually foolish our conduct might be? It was not difficult to make Naaman humble. Three means God had of bringing him low, that He might exalt Him—his leprosy, the attitude of Elisha, the simplicity of the sacramental means used for his recovery. Firstly, there was his leprosy. High position, military success, money—all together made no difference to that. Abanah and Pharpar, those admirable streams, made no difference either. And Elisha! Elisha was so useful to Naaman just because he was not impressed

by him. It was not that, recognizing Naaman's importance, Elisha pretended that he did not, or that, recognizing the value of wealth, Elisha pretended that he did not. Elisha was quite unimpressed by Naaman's blazing military decorations, and he had no use for Naaman's wealth. He stayed within his doors because he saw no reason for coming out of them. He had a message to deliver, and he saw to it that it was delivered. What more was there to do? Of the simplicity of the sacramental means it is needless to speak. It did not take Naaman long to learn his lesson. He came to the land of Israel with some pride and a great deal of leprosy. He left it having lost his pride but having lost his leprosy also. Did he think it a good exchange? Let the final scene be witness. In his beautiful garden at Damascus, in full view of the temple of Rimmon, with its marble and gold, there stands a humble altar of Israel's clay; and before it there is the great soldier, with bowed head and thankful heart, offering his sacrifice to the God Who brings down the mighty from their seats, and exalts the humble and meek. But there is a nobler example. What is St. Paul himself but the rich man brought low, the rich man who has lost all, and counted "all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord?"[1] He can glory in his humiliation, for he has gained its fruits; the morbid pride in his own superiority has gone, but he is the brother of all his fellow-members in Christ, rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with

[1] Phil. iii. 8.

those that weep, the child of God, the heir of the kingdom. So it may be with us all.

God does not hate our pride, as some preachers would suggest to us, because it is an offence to His own. He hates it because it is an offence to His divine humility, because He is Himself, as the Incarnation and the Cross have shown us, the Mighty Who comes down from His seat to exalt the humble and meek. God does not bring us low because He would keep us low, but because He would exalt us—because we never find our healing until we lose our pride.

SERMON V.

THE RECEPTION OF THE GOSPEL.

(*Fourth Sunday in Lent.*)

JAMES I. 19–25.

"Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your soul. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding the face of his birth in a mirror: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth away and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But he that looketh into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and continueth therein, being not a hearer that forgetteth, but a doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed in his doing."

IT is, brethren, a very practical subject which St. James brings before us to-day. It is the spiritual power of the gospel, and the reasons why in such a multitude of cases it fails of its due effect. It is not the purpose of St. James to preach the gospel himself; that was being already done in the towns of Galilee and Syria far more effectively by word of mouth. His purpose is to use his influence with his fellow-countrymen, that they may give it a hearing and respond to it in the right way. Now,

human nature is much the same all the world over, and the same causes which hindered the effect of the gospel then hinder its effect now. Shall we see, then, what they are, and how we are to deal with them?

I.

Let us begin by noticing what St. James says as to the power of the gospel. The writers of the New Testament are here at one. They speak of it in a way which at first surprises us, as if it were a living and personal agent. "It is," says St. Paul, "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."[1] "The word of God"—so we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews—"is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword."[2] It is, that is to say, not just an intellectual statement appealing to the mind; it is rather a mighty weapon, forged by the divine wisdom, for dealing with us in all the fullness of our personal life. The teaching of St. James is on the same lines. The gospel is a word which, when it has taken root within us, is able to save our souls. Do we all remember this as we ought to-day, and trust the gospel as we ought to trust it? The gospel of Christ is not just a word that points us to the means of grace; rightly received, it is itself a means of grace. God works upon us through it as really as He works upon us through the sacraments. Both word and sacraments are from Him, to be received with a like reverence. But we must not stay to dwell

[1] Rom. i. 16. [2] Heb. iv. 12.

upon this to-day. The immediate question is this: Why does the gospel in such a multitude of instances fail to do what in itself it is able to do? People look at the Great War, and at all the foul deeds that have marked it, and they say, What has the gospel done for the world after all? Or they look at England, and all the evils which disgrace our national life, and they say, What has the gospel done for England? Or, again, we ourselves look within and we say, Does our own experience bear out what the Apostles tell us about the power of the gospel? It may have done much for us; we believe that it has done much; but has it done all that it ought to have done? Now, these are just the questions which St. James will help us to answer. Briefly, he says that there are two causes for this failure. In the first place, we do not listen as we ought to listen. In the second place, when we have listened, we do not patiently carry into practice what we have learnt. At first sight all this seems trite and obvious. But let us look more deeply. We shall find that St. James's words show a great insight into human nature, and that we have much to learn from them.

II.

The first cause which St. James assigns for the failure of the gospel is that we fail to listen to it in the right way. "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man"—our human ill-temper—"worketh not

the righteousness of God." How needful these words were in the days of St. James the Acts of the Apostles will sufficiently tell us. St. Paul found the Jews slow to hear the message which he brought; he found them much disposed to interrupt and contradict him before he had delivered it; and he found them very quick to be angry the moment that in any way he crossed their prejudices. But let us consider our own experience. "Let every man," we read, "be swift to hear." Very often we are far from being so. Our minds are preoccupied; we do not take sufficient interest in the gospel really to give our attention to it. How is it in the place where we live? How many are there who have an intelligent belief in the gospel? How many are there who have an intelligent disbelief in it? These are hard questions to answer, but perhaps the right answer to each would be, "Not many." Before we can either believe a thing or disbelieve it, it is necessary to know exactly what it is that we are asked to believe, and perhaps there are not many who go as far as that. "Belief cometh of hearing,"[1] St. Paul tells us, and real hearing demands a considerable effort on the part of the mind. It is not only the speaker who must be active but the hearers also. There is no learning without co-operation between the teacher and the taught; the learner's efforts to learn are absolutely necessary for a satisfactory result. How are these efforts generally made? Congregations commonly complain of the dullness of the sermons to which they are asked to listen,

[1] Rom. x. 17.

and preachers commonly complain of the dullness of the congregations to which they are asked to preach. Both perhaps complain with justice. Failure results because neither preachers nor congregations do their best. The preacher does not take enough pains with his preaching, and the congregation does not take enough pains with its listening. We must be swift to hear—sluggishness of mind spoils everything.

Secondly, we must be slow to speak. What does St. James mean? Surely not that we are never to speak and never to criticize. Both are most necessary. What we swallow whole we seldom digest, and real acceptance of truth is impossible, unless our faculty of judgment is first exercised upon it. But there is a right time for this and a wrong. Every serious view of truth demands to be considered as a whole; you must have the whole case before you before you can criticize in any intelligent way. Unhappily, we are not always disposed to wait for this. Something is said which strikes us as foolish or untrue, and so, without waiting for any further light, we interrupt, if we have the chance of interrupting, and, if not, withdraw our attention, and refuse to listen further. There is, perhaps, nothing from which the gospel suffers more than from this. The religion of Christ is a great whole. Its doctrines have an intimate connection one with another, and its morals and worship depend upon its doctrines. You cannot take a part by itself and hope thoroughly to understand it. The Christian doctrine of atonement cannot be understood apart from the Christian

doctrine of sin, or the Christian doctrine of sin apart from the Christian doctrine of God. But let us take a practical example. Very many, we know, are in revolt to-day against the strictness of the Christian law of marriage. But the Christian law of marriage cannot be understood by itself. We have to remember that to Christian eyes the welfare of the community is far more important than the immediate happiness of the individual, and that the present life leads on to another beyond. The Christian view of marriage is quite intelligible as part of the general system of Christianity, but, if you try to attach it to the ordinary easygoing view of life, it is like a new patch put upon an old garment; not merely does it look absurd, it actually is so. So it is everywhere. Criticize the gospel by all means; try to think out every objection which occurs to you. But consider fundamental questions first, and grasp as a whole what you propose to criticize; many objections will then fall away.

Thirdly, be slow to wrath. The gospel tends to arouse our anger by the challenge which it offers to our ordinary ways of thinking and acting. That is, of course, unavoidable. If the gospel told us nothing that we did not know before, and so left us thinking as we thought before, it could not be a gospel at all; if it did not condemn our present practice, it could not call us to anything higher. But no one likes to think that he has been wrong, or likes the trouble involved in altering his practice, and so wrath naturally rises. St. James says that we must keep our tempers. The wrath of

man—our human, all too human, ill-temper—never does any good. It never brings about that fulfilment of the claims of God which we call righteousness, while to be angry at what we hear entirely prevents us from warning by it. There is a time, no doubt, when wrath is justified; teaching may be offered to us which is nothing less than an outrage to our consciences. But be slow to wrath. Before you attack be sure that you attack rightly. Many a man has, like St. Paul, attacked prematurely and become a convert later on.

III.

But it is not only failure to listen which hinders the power of the gospel. We may listen to it, even think we accept it, and yet no result may follow, because we take no practical action. "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves." What is the delusion of which St. James speaks? The man who has attentively listened, understood, and appreciated, feels that he has gained a great deal. He knows the truth now, and can carry it into practice later on, when his difficulties are less than at present they seem to him to be. He forgets that in a matter so essentially practical as the gospel of Christ a belief that does not issue in action is not likely to endure, and will indeed be very soon forgotten. How delightful is the illustration which St. James gives to us! "If any one is a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding the face

of his birth in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth away, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." Try the experiment. Those of us who have reached middle-life have looked in the glass about fifty thousand times. Take, then, a pencil and a piece of paper, and see whether you can draw your own face from memory with any approach to accuracy. I do not mean make an artistic picture of it—we may not have the skill for that—but get the rough outline reasonably correct. You will find that you cannot do it. And why not? Because, when you looked in the glass you did not concentrate your attention with a practical purpose in view. There it is, time after time, the face that we were born with, and there is nothing to be done about it. It may not be at all the face that we admire; if "by taking thought" we could alter it, we might give to it our most concentrated attention. But since it is the only face that we shall ever have, and nothing can be done, and we have not the slightest intention of trying to do anything, we behold ourselves, and go away, and straightway forget what manner of men we were. So it is with the gospel. If you do not practise it, you forget it. You may be ever learning, but you never come to the knowledge of the truth.[1] There is only one way—the way which St. James points out to us. We must look into the perfect law of liberty—the truth that is to govern our lives, even while it sets us free. We must look into it, as a lawyer looks into a case which he must grasp in all its

[1] Cf. 2 Tim. iii. 7.

bearings. We must continue in it, by assiduous practice of what we find there. We must be not hearers that forget—and are bound to forget—but doers that work, and so fix our principles by practice. Then we shall be blessed in our doing; yes, in our doing, and not a moment before.

SERMON VI.

FAITH AND WORKS.

(*Fifth Sunday in Lent.*)

JAMES II. 26.

"As the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead."

IT is, brethren, a wide tract of country which we must traverse to-day. We had not quite reached the end of the first chapter last Sunday, and our text to-day is the last verse of the second. But the dominant thought is everywhere the same; it is the uselessness of a faith which does not issue in practical action. St. James is no Pelagian moralist; he does not depreciate the importance of faith in the slightest degree. But the question is, not whether faith will save, but what faith will save; and a faith which is not practical comes, as we shall presently see, to the same thing as no faith at all. "As the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from" the works of love which faith demands "is dead" also.

I.

My brothers, no words of mine can possibly exaggerate the importance of this subject. It is

not only that the relation between faith and works has occasioned such controversy in the past, and still occasions it ; it is that to every one of us it is a matter of life and death. St. James has throughout the divine judgment in view, the judgment which God passes upon us now, and the judgment which He must pass, when the time comes to determine our eternal future. The question is not what kind of faith will give us comfort now, but what kind of faith will stand us in stead then. Now, religious people are often in danger of supposing that faith has a power of its own to commend us to God's favourable consideration, quite apart from the fruit which it produces in everyday life. The Jews of St. James's day thought this, and Christians often think it now. Both those whom we call Catholics and those whom we call Evangelicals lay the greatest stress upon faith, and most rightly do so. They know that what is sometimes called moralism, the notion that Christianity is simply a rule of conduct, and that it does not much matter what a man believes, is nonsense. As St. Paul says, if we can for ourselves win the favour of God by obedience to external rules, "then Christ died for nought."[1] All that is good in them, they are sure, all their hopes of a greater holiness in the time to come, depend upon faith, and upon that living union with God through Christ, which faith alone can give. But the trouble is that those of the purest hearts and the saintliest lives—those who indeed live by faith, and are indeed being saved by faith—do not always understand the real

1 Gal. ii. 21.

character of the faith which they are exercising, and attach an importance to the intellectual element in faith, which does not really belong to it. Thus they give the impression to those less sincere and whole-hearted than themselves that, if they will only believe the Catholic faith, or pass through some psychological process, by which they come to connect the death of our Lord with their own personal sins, all must ultimately be well, however slight the influence which this faith is found to exercise upon their daily lives. Now, it is from this dreadful self-delusion that it is one great function of the Epistle of St. James to guard us. We will consider in the simplest way the view of faith which lies behind St. James's words, and then endeavour to see how all this applies to ourselves to-day.

II.

It is a fine afternoon, and I go out for a lonely walk to think over next Sunday's sermon. I dislike returning by the same road as that by which I go out; and so, as soon as possible, I strike across country by the droves and the fields. All goes well at first, but, suddenly, I am confronted by a broad and deep dyke. What is to be done? I skirt it for a quarter of a mile, and discover a plank which crosses it. But the plank is apparently old; it does not appear to have been recently in use; will it bear? I do not wish to return home by my old route, but I also do not wish to be up to my neck in a fen dyke. There is no convenient person at hand who will go

over first. If I am to proceed, I must for myself make an act of faith in the plank. Moreover, you will observe that this act of faith must be sternly practical. It must be made, not in a deep and spiritual manner only with my soul, it must be made—not to put too fine a point on it—with my legs. If I walk the plank I believe; if I do not walk the plank I do not believe. Of course, intellectually, I may take an intermediate course. I may say, "As a matter of fact, I believe it would bear. But I'm not taking any risks. In these hard times to go home a different way is not worth a suit of clothes." But you will observe that a faith of that sort is "dead in itself."[1] Practically it will come to exactly the same thing as entire disbelief. But, now, suppose that I take the risk, and step upon the plank, does it matter that my faith is but a poor trembling faith, and that my heart is in my mouth? Not in the slightest degree. What matters is not where my heart is, but where my feet are. I go over just as triumphantly as the man would do who had never had a moment's doubt. Are we, then, to say that it was not the faith that mattered, but the action? Far from it. If I had not had the faith I should not have been fool enough to step upon the plank; the faith was absolutely necessary. But it was a faith that was, so to say, the inner side of resolute action; it was in taking action—in the very moment in which I stepped upon the plank—that it was "made perfect,"[2] and came to be real faith for the first time.

[1] Ch. ii. 18. [2] Ch. ii. 22.

But now from my homely illustration let us turn to St. James. He is not, we have seen reason to think, speaking to Christians alone, but to all his countrymen, whether Christians or not. How does he address them? "What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but have not works? Can that faith save him?"[1] All of you are monotheists; you believe "that God is one."[2] Very good. Some of you go further. Like myself, you hold "the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glory."[3] You believe that the carpenter of Nazareth was the glory, the Shechinah, the visible manifestation of God. Very good again. But is your faith practical? Will it save you at the judgment? Consider the demons. Who can urge anything against their orthodoxy? They not only believe that God is one; they cried out to Jesus in the synagogue, "I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God."[4] Did their faith deliver them from fear of the judgment? Far from it. They believed and trembled. They said, "What have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art Thou come to destroy us?" The demons are the persecutors of men, and they know that "judgment is without mercy to him that showed no mercy."[5] How, then, about you? Suppose that you are not yet Christians, but, as the Pharisees say, "disciples of Moses,"[6] your religion even then is a great whole; you cannot pick and choose in it; you believe it or you disbelieve it as a whole.

[1] Ch. ii. 14. [2] Ver. 19. [3] Ver. 1. There seems no justification for the A.V. and R.V. rendering here. [4] Mark i. 24, 34. [5] Ch. ii. 13. [6] John ix. 28.

If you deliberately set aside the laws of God in one point, it is as a whole that you put it aside. "He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now, if thou dost not commit adultery, but killest, thou art become a transgressor of the law."[1] "If a brother or sister be naked, and in lack of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Go in peace, be ye warmed and filled; and yet ye give them not the things needful to the body"[2]—and so in fact kill them—you are setting aside your religion. What sort of faith in God is that which allows you to break His laws and leave His people to starve? Still more, suppose that you are Christian Jews, and say that you believe in Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth. What sort of faith can it be if, when a poor carpenter comes into your synagogue in his working clothes, you tell him to stand, while you put the rich man who persecutes the faith in a good place? The religion of Christ is like the religion of Moses in this. It is a great whole, and you believe it or disbelieve it as a whole. If you believe in Jesus as King and Lord, you must, of course, observe the "royal law," and love your neighbour as yourself. What is faith in the Lordship of Christ but the inner side of treating Him as Lord, and so obeying Him? If you believe in Christ as the glory, show your faith by your works. It is only an active faith which can commend you to God. It is in action that faith is perfected, and comes to be real faith for the first time. Just as the faith of Abraham that God could raise Isaac from the dead[3] became

[1] Ch. ii. 10, 11. [2] Vv. 15, 16. [3] Cf. Heb. xi. 19.

indeed faith, in stretching forth his hand to slay his son—just as the faith of Rahab in the cause of Israel and Israel's God became indeed faith, in receiving and preserving the spies of Israel—so will your faith in God and in Christ His glory become indeed faith, in the practice of the love that they demand of you.

III.

My brothers, if these things be so, how do you and I stand? Are we believers? We answer that we hope so. But what has hope to do with it? "If," says Bishop Wilson, "you wish to ascertain the state of your heart, you should impartially review your actions." We have seen what faith is. It is the inner side—the necessary inner side—of Christian action. Given opportunity—and all of us have it more or less—we believe just what we carry into practice, neither more nor less. You can, if you will, give the name of faith to some ideas in your mind upon which you do not act, but, as we have seen, to all intents and purposes such faith is the same as unbelief. Faith must be practical or it is nothing, and its necessary practical expression is quite as much in acts of love as in acts of prayer and worship. Prayer and communion are, no doubt, expressions of faith, but they cannot stand alone. He that said "Do this in remembrance of Me" said also "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," and the religion of Christ is a whole, to be taken or left. Are you a Catholic, who lays

stress upon the necessity of believing faithfully every clause in the Creed? Then consider its practical application. We have thought already of faith in God and of faith in Jesus Christ; we will think of the third part of the Creed. What sort of belief can it be in the Holy Catholic—the Holy Universal—Church, which leaves you careless of the missionary call? What sort of belief in the Communion of Saints can it be, which leaves you unwilling to have anything in common with others which you can keep to yourself? What sort of belief is it in the life everlasting, which leaves you unwilling at the call of God to sacrifice your interest and pleasures in this one? Do you not see that faith in the life everlasting precisely consists in the sacrifice of the present life? Or are you an evangelical, whose faith centres almost entirely in the death of our Lord? Why did He die? What says your favourite Apostle? "He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him Who for their sakes died and rose again."[1] What kind of faith in the death of our Lord can it be, which leaves you still living for yourself, and not for Him and for your brothers and sisters in Him? In these dark days, when our future seems to have lost the security which it once possessed, we all are daily tempted to be selfish, to harden our hearts at the cry of the needy, and say that we have enough to do in providing for ourselves. Remember that it is not love only which is being tested, but faith also. If we refuse the former, we refuse the latter. Let us hear the

[1] 2 Cor. v. 15.

conclusion of the whole matter. You and I, my brothers, are all alike—sinners. Eternal life—the life that is life indeed—is on the other side of an impassable stream. The only bridge is the faith of Jesus Christ, with all that it implies of obedience and the sacrifice of self. Can you trust the bridge? Will it bear? To be a Christian, and to continue a Christian, will ask so much of you, that you are risking much in committing yourself. St. Paul could say "If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable." A life in which no sacrifice has been made is not likely to be a Christian life at all. But if you are willing to take the risks and accept the sacrifices, you have all the faith that is actually necessary, however disturbed that faith may sometimes be. In that grand old book "The Pilgrim's Progress" there is a character called Mr. Fearful. Mr. Fearful is always taking the gloomiest view of his prospects; he has little expectation of reaching the heavenly city. But he has started by the right road, and, though moaning and groaning as he goes, day by day he walks steadily along it. Of course he reaches the heavenly city just as certainly as Christian and Hopeful themselves. Brethren, once more, the faith that will stand us in stead at the last is the faith that is one with love, and works by love. It is only as it finds expression that it is real faith at all. As St. Bernard says, "*Mors fidei est separatio charitatis*"—the death of faith is separation from love.

SERMON VII.

THE TONGUE.

JAMES III. 2.

"If any stumbleth not in word, the same is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also."

THERE is, I think, a close connection between this passage and the passage which immediately precedes it. One great reason why our so-called faith is so valueless is that we allow it to evaporate in talk, instead of translating it into action. In the Jewish Christian communities, with which St. James had to deal, this evil was especially rife. With them, as with the Corinthian Christians every one had a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, an interpretation,[1] and the result was disastrous. So far from doing any good, all this talking did actual harm both to speakers and to hearers. Now, we English Christians are not, as a rule, guilty of misusing our tongues in precisely the same way as that in which the Jewish Christians misused theirs. We do not, as a rule, take the same interest in religious questions, nor are we, as a rule, accustomed to give so much time to the discussion

[1] 1 Cor. xiv. 26.

of them. But though this is so with most of us, there are many exceptions. There are those now, as then, to whom religion is not only religion, but, if I may so say, a hobby as well, and they are assailed by the same dangers as those of which St. James speaks. Moreover, it is not only in matters of religion that we misuse our tongues. Our tongues run away with us when we speak of other matters, and, as we shall see, dark days especially incline us to misuse them. We will, guided by the words of St. James in the first twelve verses of this chapter, consider three things—the importance of the tongue, the three instances which St. James gives of its misuse, and the cure which he suggests.

Now I do not think we can deny that, as we first read these verses, St. James appears to us to be guilty of exaggeration. It is not that we have any doubt as to the harm which the tongue can do; here, indeed, as St. James says, a spark may kindle a forest fire. It is rather that we feel that St. James gives to the tongue that central place in its control of our life which belongs rather to the heart. Is it, we say, really the case that "If any stumbleth not in word, the same is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also"? Might not a man conceivably control his tongue, and yet be far from a perfect Christian in other ways? Moreover, are the illustrations which St. James give sound illustrations? Does the tongue stand to the life as the bridle to the horse, or the rudder to the ship? Is it not rather true that it is "the heart," as our Lord said, "from which every-

thing ultimately proceeds,"[1] and that what we say is but one significant illustration of what we are? "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. The good man out of his good treasure bringeth forth good things; and the evil man out of his evil treasure bringeth forth evil things."[2] Our Lord's words appear to us exactly to express the truth as experience reveals it to us, but the words of St. James at first do not. Now if that be our view, it is interesting to observe that we have only to continue the reading of our Lord's words to find Him speaking very much as St. James speaks. "And I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."[3] Surely such language suggests that our words are so representative of all that we are, that there would be no injustice in judging us exclusively by them. Now what are we to make of this? The truth, I think, is that, as St. James taught us in the last chapter, the inward and the outward are inseparable, and, since words are the simplest and most natural expression of the mind and heart, all good and all evil, which the will has fully accepted, necessarily finds expression in them. That might not be true, if we confined our attention to the words which we speak in the presence of others, but we must look further than these. Many of us, especially those who are much alone, have the habit of talking to ourselves. If we do not actually talk to ourselves aloud, or even form words

[1] Matt. xv. 19. [2] Matt. xii. 34, 35. [3] Matt. xii. 36, 37.

with our lips, we form them in our imagination, and, indeed, carry on our processes of thought largely by their means. Examine then your experience. You will find that, if you give way to pride or to bitterness, you form contemptuous or bitter words in your mind, which you imagine yourself as speaking to others or of others; and that, if you give way to vainglory, you form words of praise and admiration in your mind, which you imagine some one else as speaking to you or of you. Indeed, it is precisely in the formation of these words consciously and wilfully that the pride and the vainglory consist. If, on the other hand, you succeed in controlling this exercise of your imagination, you are excluding the sins just where it is most difficult to exclude them, and, having won your victory there, you will win it everywhere. But that is just what St. James says: "If any stumbleth not in word, the same is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also." The ship of life, great as it is, and driven by the rough winds of temptation, is turned about by the "very small rudder" of the tongue. Words, no doubt, are the overflow of the heart, as our Lord says, but do not regard them as a mere symptom of the heart's condition, unimportant in comparison with the heart itself. God may have ways of dealing with our hearts which we cannot fully understand; we must cast ourselves upon His grace, and ask Him to deal with them. But we ourselves, in our efforts to co-operate with God, have no better way of dealing with our hearts than by the control of our speech. Speak humbly, even when you speak

but to yourself, and you will yourself be humble. Speak kindly, and you will be kind. Speak cheerfully, and you will be cheerful. You cannot separate that which is within you from that which is without.

II.

We are touching to-day upon a vast subject. Let us consider the examples which St. James gives to us.

He urges upon us, in the first place, humility and caution in our effects to instruct other people. "Do not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment. For in many things we all stumble." The man who sets himself to teach others incurs a special responsibility. Since we all make mistakes, we may mislead those who listen to us; and, if God has not called us to teach, why run the risk? We have seen already what St. James has in mind. He is not thinking of the work of the Christian teacher in the fulfilment of his duty; St. James himself is teaching as he writes these words. Still less is he thinking of the efforts which we ought to make, whether clergy or laity, to give spiritual help to those around us. Of that St. James speaks in the last words of his Epistle. What St. James has in mind is the Jews' overestimate of their competence to be the instructors of others.[1] It is not a characteristic fault of English lay people; perhaps they are more often silent when they ought

[1] Cf. Rom. ii. 17–20.

to speak. But there are two classes who are tempted to it. There are those who have little idea of the seriousness of religion, or of the necessity of knowledge, if they are to have the right to an opinion about it. They find religion an interesting subject of discussion, and express freely, and sometimes arrogantly, any ideas that may have occurred to them, without recognizing that their responsibility is any greater, than if they were speaking about art or poetry. There are those, again, who, like the Jews of old, have strong convictions about almost every question of duty or of religion. They do not feel that, in giving expression to these, they run any risk of error. Thus the moment that anything is said with which they do not entirely agree their tongues, as St. James says, are "restless" and fall forthwith to instruction. Now, this class of people would do well to ponder St. James's words. There is a time to give instruction, but to give it involves responsibility. Are we prepared to accept it? Let us remember that the word "certainty" has two meanings. It is used to describe a subjective state of mind and it is used to describe an objective truth. Hence confusion sometimes arises. We suppose that because subjectively we are certain of a thing, the thing itself is objectively certain, and that is far from being the case.

But St. James has a far greater evil in view than this. Bitterness and cruelty in speech do far more harm than ill-founded self-confidence. There is, I think, to-day less bitterness and injustice in

religious controversy than there once was. The words of F. W. Robertson, in his celebrated sermon on the tongue, seem to us to-day somewhat over-strained, when he deals with this bitterness. But the evil is far from having altogether passed away. Still, "the tongue is a fire," a "world of iniquity among our members." Still, it is unhappily true that we use the same member to "bless the Lord and Father," and to curse men who are made after His likeness. Still, it is only too possible to "have bitter jealousy and faction" in our hearts, and so to "glory and lie against the truth." St. James's words go deep. In the first place, everything, as our Lord taught us, must be considered in relation to God its Creator, and honoured accordingly—the heaven, the earth, Jerusalem, and our bodies.[1] Especially is this true of our fellow-men. We must "honour all men,"[2] in our speech about them, as in other ways. The language of menace and of insult can never be in place. Secondly, jealousy and faction are always fruitful in illusion and falsehood. The man full of party-feeling can never see either his friends or his opponents as they really are. He glories quite unreasonably in the virtues and talents of those who agree with him, and underrates and misrepresents those who do not. Here, too, the tongue is restless, and here it is often full of deadly poison. Is it too much to say that it "defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the wheel of nature, and is set on fire by hell"? That, no doubt, is strong language, but look at the facts. It is the power of hell which is in fact at

[1] Cf. Matt. v. 34–36. [2] 1 Pet. ii. 17.

work. What inspires our bitter and cruel speeches is not love of truth; it is the fact that we ourselves are identified with the view that we take of truth. Our own pride and ambition have far more to do with our injustice than any higher considerations. Moreover, as we give way to bitterness of speech, the evil gains a stronger hold upon us; our own injustice in speech inflames us, and we proceed to unjust action. Thus we stimulate a corresponding injustice in others, and the evil is extended more and more widely. Now here is a consideration which may help us. The differences of religious people go very deep. Generally they go down to first principles, and sound first principles are not easy to attain. Most religious people, having arrived at their first principles, apply them on the whole correctly and consistently. The trouble is, that so often we think the truth of our own first principles self-evident, and regard the teaching and practice of others as wicked, not because they set aside their own first principles, but because they set aside ours. St. James reminds us of two things which should check us in our bitter speaking. The first is that, in condemning one another upon such uncertain grounds, we venture to condemn the divine law, which refuses us permission to do so. The second is that, in passing a sentence, which we have no power to execute, we are guilty of an absurdity. "Speak not one against another, brethren. He that speaketh against a brother, or judgeth his brother, speaketh against the law, and judgeth the law . . . One only is the lawgiver and judge, even He Who is able to save and

to destroy; but who art thou that judgest thy neighbour?"[1]

There is one other misuse of the tongue which St. James mentions, and that is grumbling. Let us translate his words quite literally: "Groan not brethren, one against another, that ye be not judged: behold, the Judge standeth before the doors."[2] The words are admirably chosen. We do not groan at large; if we groan, we groan against somebody; pessimism is always accompanied by the condemnation of other people. It is a great evil, always rife in dark days. If we are depressed as to the outlook either in the world or in the Church, we look out for scapegoats, and we generally find them in our rulers. Why do they not do this—or that? Many to-day are depressed about the Church of England. It has become a habit—and a pose—to stand in a white sheet. Well! humility and penitence are good, if they are sincere. But we must be careful that we place the white sheet round our own shoulders; sometimes we adjust it very carefully round the shoulders of others. Pessimism about the Church of God is always disgraceful, but it is especially disgraceful in the young; in the young we expect hope and enthusiasm. The warning of St. James is here most valuable. At all our doors the Judge is standing. He is very competent; we had better leave condemnation in His hands. Pessimism always leads to apathy, idleness, and self-indulgence—the very things which have brought about the evils which depress us. And pessimistic speech is "full of deadly

[1] Ch. iv. 11, 12. [2] Ch. v. 9.

poison" to ourselves and others; the more we use it, the more we become the people who have least right to use it. We

> "Lift a cry
> Against this work-day world, this ill-spread feast,
> As if ourselves were better certainly
> Than what we came to. Maker and High Priest,
> I ask Thee not my joys to multiply—
> Only to make me worthier of the least."[1]

Yes, it is a work-day world; there is neither time nor justification for grumbling. Especially let us avoid both in the Church and in the State a foolish condemnation of our rulers, which takes no account of their difficulties. "It is the duty of the newspapers," says Bishop Creighton, "to tell us what to do: it is our duty not to do it. If things were as simple as our critics make them out, we would have done what they advise long ago."[2]

III.

Lastly, what is the remedy? Not the suppression of speech, but the right use of it, the use of the "best member" that we have to glorify God. "Therewith bless we the Lord and Father." That is the "sweet water," for which our tongues were made. "Salt water" cannot "yield sweet," though we may try to justify it on the ground that it will. "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God,"[1] and bitter speech is never productive of reform. It is when the praises

[1] E. B. Browning, "Adequacy."
[2] "Life and Letters of Mandell Creighton," p. 505. [3] Ch. i. 20.

of God are in our mouths that the two-edged sword is in our hands. Keep speech sweet from the first. The instruction of others, censure, and grumbling can all be overdone, but not worship, praise, or thanksgiving. The habit of worship is the cure for all sins of the tongue. Count up your blessings, personal, national, and ecclesiastical, and give thanks for them. Practice God-examination, and praise Him for what He is.

"Lift up your hearts! We lift them, Lord, to Thee;
And at Thy feet none other may we see;
Lift up your hearts! E'en so, with one accord,
We lift them up, we lift them to the Lord.

"Above the level of the former years,
The mire of sin, the slough of guilty fears,
The mist of doubt, the blight of love's decay,
O Lord of Light, lift all our hearts to-day."[2]

Then, if we must, as we return, see both others and ourselves, we shall see them in the light of God. He holds the future in His hands, and if He is confident surely we can be so.

[1] H. Montagu Butler.

SERMON VIII.

THE PASSION OF THE LORD.

(*Sixth Sunday in Lent.*)

JAMES III. 13–18.

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him shew by his good life his works in wisdom's gentleness. But if ye have bitter jealousy and faction in your heart, glory not and lie not against the truth. This wisdom is not a wisdom that cometh down from above, but is of the earth, merely human, a demon's wisdom. For where jealousy and faction are, there is confusion and every vile deed. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, reasonable, conciliatory, full of mercy and good fruits, without doubtfulness, without insincerity. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for them that make peace."

THERE is, perhaps, no more wonderful contrast drawn for us by St. James than that which these verses contain. The writers of the Bible deal much in contrasts; good and evil, love and hatred, light and darkness, stand continually over against one another, with little account taken of the gradations which experience seems to present. These abrupt contrasts are especially characteristic of St. James. But here, surely, he excels himself. He knew well by practical experience both the false wisdom of the world and the true wisdom that comes down from above, while the Jews, to

whom he was writing, confused them. They supposed that it was possible to be experts in religion, the appointed teachers of the world, while bitter jealousy and faction were reigning in their hearts, and their tongues were worlds of iniquity, defiling the whole body, and set on fire by hell.[1] Such a combination is impossible. In the highest things wisdom and character go together. The presence within us of the wisdom that comes down from above is shown by the presence of the character which necessarily accompanies it.

I.

It may seem to you that this is a strange subject to choose for Palm Sunday. Surely we should dwell to-day upon the Passion of our Lord. But what was the Passion of our Lord but the most wonderful instance ever seen of the very truth which St. James sets before us? If we want to see the earthly wisdom, we have only to look at the Sadducean priests and Pharisaic scribes, who brought about our Lord's death; if we want to see the heavenly wisdom, we have only to look at our Lord Himself. The priests and elders were essentially men, who in their different ways could claim to be "wise and understanding." Caiaphas and the Sadducees knew the world or thought that they knew it, and they dealt with a difficult situation with surpassing cleverness. Though, so far as physical power was concerned, Pilate was strong,

[1] Ch. iii. 6.

and Caiaphas was weak, it was Caiaphas who had his way with the Lord, and not Pilate. The Scribes and Pharisees were experts in the religion of the Old Testament. They claimed, as St. Paul says, to be guides of the blind, lights of them that are in darkness, correctors of the foolish, teachers of babes.[1] But the story of the Passion shows both Sadducees and Pharisees with bitter jealousy and faction in their hearts, lying against the truth; and we see for ourselves that "where jealousy and faction are, there is confusion and very vile deed." Their wisdom was plainly, as St. James says, a wisdom "of the earth"; it was a wisdom merely human, and well within the reach of those who had none of the Spirit of God; it was a wisdom of demons, in the sense that, like belief without practice, a demon might have it as well as a man. Our Lord must have seemed to His contemporaries wanting in the wisdom both of the Sadducees and of the Pharisees. Men would have said that it was madness to go up to Jerusalem at all, and that never did an Oriental conduct his defence with so little adroitness. Wonderful as was His insight into the Old Testament, our Lord had never studied in the Rabbinical schools.[2] But if you will take word by word St. James's description of the heavenly wisdom, you will see that, consciously or unconsciously, it is the wisdom of our Lord which he is describing, the very wisdom which He manifested in His Passion. The wisdom of the Lord is pure; it is His Father's glory that He seeks. "That the world may know that I love the Father,

[1] Rom. ii. 19, 20. [2] John vii. 15.

and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do."[1] His wisdom is peaceable. The kingdom that He seeks is "not of this world"; His servants must not fight that He "should not be delivered to the Jews," and the place for St. Peter's sword is in its sheath.[2] Even in His Passion He is reasonable and conciliatory. Listen to Him in the high priests' court: "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou Me?"[3] Or note His whole bearing before Pilate. He gives to Pilate all the information which bears upon his duty, and is only silent when Pilate asks a question which has no bearing upon his duty at all.[4] He is full of mercy and good fruits, healing Malchus, recalling St. Peter with a look, praying for His murderers, making a home for Mary. He is without doubtfulness, and without insincerity. Even in the moment of His condemnation to death, He looks forward confidently to sitting at the right hand of God,[5] and can say that, unlike the high priests, He has nothing to conceal.[6]

II.

Brethren, it is the man who has wisdom's gentleness who is the true teacher, and it is when most he exhibits it that he teaches best. What says the Lord Himself? "Beware of false prophets. . . . Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"[7]

[1] John xiv. 31. [2] John xviii. 36; Matt. xxvi. 52.
[3] John xviii. 23. [4] John xviii. 36–38; xix. 9.
[5] Matt. xxvi. 64. [6] John xviii. 20, 21. [7] Matt. vii. 15, 16.

It is just because He Himself is so infinitely gentle, so far removed from the thorn and the thistle, that He calls us to listen to Him. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."[1] When shall we listen to Him, and when shall we learn from Him in word and in deed, if not in Holy Week? We do not need this week the wisdom of the man of the world; the Cross shows that the "wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."[2] "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."[3] We do not need so much this week the wisdom of the scholar and the expert, though that, of course, has its place. The story of the Passion is full of historical problems. How are the events to be arranged? On which day did the Lord eat His last Supper with the Apostles? How many times was He tried before the courts of the Jews and of the Romans? At what hour was He crucified? Even a scholar devoid of Christian faith may help us here. But it is not these things that we chiefly need to know. We want to know the purpose of the Lord's Passion, the spirit which made it an acceptable offering to the Father, the way in which we are afresh to take up our own crosses and follow our Master, and it is our Lord Himself Who can best teach us all this. He tells us that He gives His life "a ransom for many,"[4] that His body is "given" for us, and His

[1] Matt. xi. 29, 30. [2] 1 Cor. iii. 19.
[3] 1 Cor. i. 25. [4] Matt. xx. 28.

blood "poured out for us."[1] He shows us that it is His insight into the Father's will, His desire that the Father's will, not His own, shall be done,[2] and not His suffering and death in themselves which make His self-oblation dear to the Father's heart. He makes it clear to us that to take up our crosses and follow Him means, not merely to bear patiently what we must bear in any case, but to accept suffering that we can easily avoid, because we cannot do the Father's will without it, and so recognize in it the will of God for us, the way in which we ourselves must be conformed to His likeness. That is what we have chiefly to learn this week, and it is for our Lord Himself to teach it to us. Can we enter into our Lord's passion? Can we grasp the meaning of His words and of His deeds? Only if the heavenly wisdom is in measure given to ourselves, and the Spirit of the Lord is beginning to be our own spirit. "My teaching is not Mine, but His that sent Me. If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak from Myself."[3] And, again, "Why do ye not understand My speech? Even because ye cannot hear My word."[4] If we are without sympathy with the message which our Lord brings to us, His words are sure to appear unintelligible. It is the teaching of the Spirit convicting us of sin, revealing to us the Father, inspiring in us the longing to walk in our Lord's steps, which must enable us to enter into, and to profit by, His Passion. We shall not

[1] Luke xxii. 19, 20.
[2] Matt. xxvi. 39.
[3] John vii. 16, 17.
[4] John viii. 43.

understand why He gave His life a ransom for many unless we feel ourselves to be the "bond-servants of sin,"[1] and to have forfeited our true life; we shall not understand why His body was given for us, and His blood poured out, unless we know our need of an atoning sacrifice and a heavenly food. We shall not understand why His sacrifice was acceptable unless we know that God is love, and asks the sacrifice of love. We shall not be willing to follow in His steps unless we see that a sacrifice, which failed to make us sacrifices in and with Him, would be a sacrifice which could do nothing for us worth the doing. We need the heavenly wisdom if we are indeed to be taught effectually all these things. Shall we not, as we enter upon Holy Week, pray for that wisdom? The Lord comes to us to-day, "meek, and riding upon an ass,"[2] full of wisdom's gentleness, the perfect Teacher as well as the perfect King. Let us pray for the wisdom which will enable us to listen to Him.

III.

And now we turn to the last words of St. James: "The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for them that make peace." They are difficult words in some respects, but the general meaning is clear. That accomplishment of God's will which we call righteousness is the one thing which is really fruitful in the world. Sown in peace, it springs up and

[1] John viii. 34. [2] Matt. xxi. 5.

grows, and for all who themselves are working for peace bears an abundant harvest. It is so with the Passion and Death of the Lord. The Passion and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ were, though brought about by men, the accomplishment of the will of God, and therefore we can set no limit to their power. The "grain of wheat" has fallen "into the earth," and died, but because it has died "it beareth much fruit."[1] "Sown in peace" and wisdom's gentleness, it is the source of the new life of the kingdom of God now, and the foundation of the perfect kingdom of peace, which at last will come. Surely we shall look beyond ourselves this week, and remember that for all that make peace the sacrifice of our Lord endures in never-failing power. Thousands upon thousands who are battling to-day for the cause of righteousness, warring that they may end war and bring in a new order for the nations, know little yet of the meaning of our Lord's Death. But the Death was died for them, nevertheless, and some day, we believe, though perhaps in another world than this, they will know that it was died, and why. *Via crucis, via lucis.* The way of the cross is the way of light. It is as we follow it that we shall come to understand it, and as others follow it that they will come to understand it with us.

[1] John xii. 24.

SERMON IX.

THE KILLING OF THE RIGHTEOUS ONE.

(*Good Friday.*)

JAMES v. 6.

"Ye have condemned, ye have killed the Righteous One; is He not in array against you?"

THE text, as I have read it, is startling to those familiar with the Authorized and Revised Versions; but I do not think we can easily doubt that it is Calvary which is in the mind of St. James, and, if so, surely no other translation of his words is possible. "The Righteous One" seems to have been a common title of the Lord in the earliest days of the Church. St. Peter uses it;[1] so does St. Stephen;[2] so does that Ananias, who was sent to help St. Paul;[3] and St. James, if I rightly interpret him, uses it here. But St. James would be the last to say that the Lord in His heavenly glory is not resisting the Jewish people; "the judge standeth before the doors,"[4] and it is because He is standing there that the outlook is so dark and menacing. Just as, according to St. James, "God resisteth the proud,"[5] so the Son of God, the

[1] Acts iii. 14. [2] Acts vii. 52. [3] Ib. xxii. 14.
[4] Ch. v. 9. [5] Ch. iv. 6.

exalted Christ, resists them also. The purpose of St. James's words here is not to dwell upon the patience of the Lord; it is to dwell upon His subduing majesty, and the profound seriousness of the crucifixion for those who have been responsible for it.

I.

Now, my brethren, it is this subject which I desire to bring before you to-day. We have been listening to St. James all this Lent, and we will listen to him still. If the aspect of the Cross, upon which he dwells, is to us a new aspect, or one which we have almost forgotten, that is a strong reason for laying stress upon it; it may be the very aspect which we most need to consider. St. James was very near in time to the tragedy of which he speaks. It is all vivid to his recollection, a deed of shame and blood, which roused his burning indignation at the time, and rouses it still as he thinks of it. He does not speak of the "death" of the Lord—that would have been for him far too mild and colourless a word; he speaks of the Lord's "killing." The human agents are still alive and unpunished, and St. James has not learned, as we have done, almost to forget them in the thought of the love which brought our Lord to the Cross, and of the salvation which it has won. Nor is St. James alone in this. St. Peter, in the earliest days, speaks in the same way: "Him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men

did crucify and slay."[1] "Ye denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of Life."[2] Now, this aspect of the Cross is one which we ought never to let go, and which the Church never allows us to let go. Good Friday—good as in the deepest sense it is—is the day of the world's most awful crime, and the world has not repented of it. It is in the eyes of the Church the darkest day of the whole year—a day when our very altars should be stripped bare; a day, not for anticipating the joy of the Easter salvation, but for going down into the depths of that horror and fear which the killing of the Lord ought to inspire in us all. And why so? Because the world's attitude to our Lord then is its attitude still, and we ourselves have much of the spirit of the world in us. It is easy to be outwardly and in word on the Lord's side now that He has triumphed; but should we have been on His side had we been living on the first Good Friday, or does the similarity of our own spirit to that of some, if not all, of our Lord's enemies show that we, too, should have been against Him? We may say what we will of the Jews, but is there any reason to suppose that our own nation would treat Him better to-day, if He came to us in the humble form in which He came of old? And if there is not, "is He not in array against us," and are not the dangers which menace us the proof that He is so?

II.

Why was it that when our Lord "came unto

[1] Acts ii. 23. [2] Acts iii. 14, 15.

His own" His own "received Him not"?[1] Why instead of receiving Him, did they condemn Him and kill Him? The Jews of Jerusalem in our Lord's day were a people greatly divided among themselves; but there was one thing in which they were able to unite, and that was the condemnation and killing of the Lord. The Sadducees in high places, the religious Pharisees, the populace of the city, all had their share of responsibility for the Cross. If one of these three classes had taken the Lord's side, He would never have been crucified. What, then, was the reason for this strange unanimity? Let us think of the three classes, one by one.

What, then, firstly, of the Sadducean high priests? We need not concern ourselves with their religious opinions; religious opinions, as far as we know, had nothing to do with their attitude towards our Lord. The high priests were neither for this view of religion nor for that view of religion; the high priests were for themselves and their nation. The great priestly families, out of which such men as Annas and Caiaphas came, had been but a few years earlier the rulers of Israel. From the Maccabean rising to the days of Herod the Great, priesthood and authority over the state had been united as never before in Israel's history. And though these days were now over, and the nation was ruled by Rome, the wealth and position of the priestly families had by no means passed away, and they were hostile to our Lord, because His action and His teaching threatened all for which

[1] John i. 16.

they cared. It was not only that our Lord's cleansing of the Temple interfered with the profits they were making; it was that our Lord's claims threatened the whole existing order. Listen to Caiaphas: "If we let Him alone, all men will believe on Him: and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."[1] Or listen to Annas as he asks "Jesus of His disciples, and of His teaching."[2] In our Lord's disciples and our Lord's claims Annas sees the danger of a rebellion against Rome, and that, he is sure, will be futile, and end in the loss of all that is dear to them. Annas and Caiaphas probably knew little about our Lord and His teaching; the Sadducees never gave the attention to religious questions which the Pharisees gave. But they saw that He imperilled the existing order, and in comparison with that they thought His life of no importance. That is the characteristic attitude of the rich. If religion means the support of existing arrangements, they will be supporters of religion; but if it threatens them, those who stand for it must be crushed at all costs.

Thus far for the Sadducees. What of the Pharisees? Here we have to do with men of a totally different stamp. The Pharisees were the party of religion, devoted to the religion of Israel as they understood it. Many of them in the past had died nobly for their faith, and, though our Lord's denunciation shows plainly that their religion was no longer the reality which it once had been, we shall do the Pharisees great injustice

[1] John xi. 48. [2] John xviii. 19.

if we regard them all as conscious hypocrites, in the modern sense of the word. The trouble was that they had come to identify religion with their own religious system, and rather than abandon it they would crucify anyone who threatened its continuance. Now, our Lord did threaten it. The supernatural beliefs of the Pharisees our Lord shared. But the Pharisees had turned the noble and beautiful religion of Israel into a hard and intolerable system of legalism, which covered every part of life—a system in which the traditions of men were put on a level with the law of God, and at times even supplanted it. They tithed "mint, and anise, and cummin," and left "undone the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faith," and that our Lord would not endure. He refused to accept their reading of the law of Moses, and by word and deed set it aside, while at the same time He made moral and spiritual demands upon them which they were not prepared to meet. The real demand of the Pharisees was that mercy and justice should yield to the claims of the legal system that they had worked out; the real demand of our Lord was that the legal system should yield to the claims of mercy and justice. Now, that is the danger of religious people at all times. Our religious system usurps the place of the living God. We do not like to be brought, as our Lord brings us, face to face with God and His limitless claims; we shrink from the self-surrender which faith involves. What we like is, as we sometimes say, to "know what we have to do." We like to have a clearly defined

system, whose demands can be stated in black and white, and in obeying which we can feel that we have fulfilled our obligations, and that there is no more to be asked of us. Brethren, we should all consider this very carefully. In all our religious systems to-day the place of Jesus Christ is so great that it is difficult to think of them as rivals to Him. But legalism is legalism, and it is and must be always the enemy of the religion of our Lord.

Thirdly, what of the common people? They were probably, for the most part, neither Sadducees nor Pharisees. What they desired was a great uplift for themselves. They wished the Romans to be cast out and themselves to become lords of the world, as the prophets of the Old Testament seemed to promise them. They were not naturally hostile to our Lord, as the Sadducees and Pharisees were. He threatened nothing that they held dear. If He would have proclaimed Himself to be the kind of deliverer for which they were looking, they would have followed Him to the death. But for our Lord's deep and spiritual religion they had no use. Barabbas, the bold insurrectionary leader, was their hero, and when the choice between our Lord and Barabbas was given them their choice was to ask for Barabbas and to destroy Jesus. Notice in the story of the Passion how it came about. The common people had nothing to do with our Lord's apprehension. Probably when they gathered round Pilate's palace in the early morning, they knew nothing of what had taken place, and came simply to ask for the release of Barabbas.[1] But their devotion to Barabbas

[1] Mark xv. 6–8.

and to the aims for which Barabbas stood, involved the sacrifice of the Lord, and they did not shrink from the sacrifice. Now, that is the danger of the masses of the people at all times. To say that our Lord is the friend of the poor is not to say that the poor are necessarily the friends of our Lord. Generally speaking, their minds are set upon aims quite different from His. If the religious people will help them to attain their own aims, well and good; but, if not, they have little use for religion. They may not be at all hostile to our Lord personally, but they set him aside for leaders and teachers of a different kind.

III.

My brothers, when we trace to its roots the awful crime of which we think to-day, we begin to wonder how we should have acted ourselves. It is easy for us, as a rule, to feel ourselves to be on the side of Jesus Christ, for we have formed a picture of Him consistent with our own view of life, and steadfastly maintain that our picture is the true one. Our imaginary Christ is on our side, and therefore we feel ourselves to be on His. But let us go back to St. James, whose words we have been studying this Lent, and by his words judge of the correctness of our picture. He was very close to our Lord in His earthly life; there is no writer of the New Testament, who so closely reproduces our Lord's actual teaching. Do we find ourselves at home with St. James? If we are rich, are we

at home with him? He is terribly severe with the rich. If we are religious people, are we at home with him? Do we feel that what we mean by religion is the same as what St. James means by religion, or do we find him startling, disturbing, out of sympathy with our actual religious life and outlook? If we are poor, do we find ourselves at home with him? To a certain extent, no doubt, we do; we enjoy his denunciations of others. But do we not feel that he stops short just when we wish him to go on, and that when he tells us to "be patient until the coming of the Lord"[1] he forfeits our sympathy, and we no longer take an interest in what he says? Well, let us not deceive ourselves. St. James says what our Lord said before him, and nothing else. He may startle us more than our Lord startles us, because we are less familiar with his words, and have not yet learnt to put a meaning of our own upon them. But our Lord says what St. James says, and if, in the last resort, we are not prepared for the present order of things to pass away, or for a profound alteration in the character of our religion, or for patient endurance, there is little doubt where we should have stood on the first Good Friday. We should —unwillingly, perhaps, but nevertheless really— have taken our part in condemning and killing the Righteous One. More than this, we are condemning Him, killing Him still. His life is being stifled in the world to-day, because now, as then, the rich, and the poor, and the conventionally religious, are, in fact, united against Him.

[1] Ch. v. 7.

Brethren, "is He not in array against us?" Do we not to-day almost see with our eyes His words in His Passion fulfilled: "Henceforth ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven"?[1] Though he has a life in His Church, where, as of old, He is subject to the worst that we can do to Him, He has a life also at the right hand of power, where He rules the world, and there we are subject to Him and not He to us. The Judge to-day is not just standing before the doors; He has entered them, and is exercising His judgment. If you and I are to escape it, it is not enough to believe that He died for the sins of the world; we must break our own connection with those sins, and accept the judgment which He is exercising upon them.

[1] Matt. xxvi. 64.

SERMON X.

THE EARLY AND LATTER RAIN.

(*Easter Day.*)

JAMES v. 7, 8.

"Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it, until it receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord is at hand."

IT is not easy to find in the Epistle of St. James a text for Easter Day. He writes, as we have seen, for those who did not, as well as for those who did, believe the Easter message. But the thought of Easter is near at hand, whenever Jesus is called "the Lord," since it was by raising Him from the dead that the Father declared Him to be Lord and Christ. So it is especially when St. James speaks of the Lord's second coming—His coming in glory. It is the risen Lord Whom he expects to bring the harvest of the kingdom of God. Easter brought the promise of it: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."[1]

[1] 1 Pet. i. 3.

But the harvest itself waits for our Lord's second coming. Till He comes we must be patient, and stablish our hearts.

I.

It was an unfamiliar aspect of our Lord's death which St. James brought before us on Good Friday; it is an unfamiliar aspect of Easter which he brings before us to-day. But the way in which St. James looks at Easter is just as natural as the way in which he looks at Good Friday. Easter to the early Christians was primarily the assurance of the coming of the kingdom of God. How does St. Peter continue those glowing words that I have just quoted to you? What is the living hope of which he speaks? It is of "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."[1] To believe, as the Apostles believed in the time of the Lord's earthly life, that He was the Christ, was to believe that He would establish the kingdom of God; they "hoped that it was He which should redeem Israel";[2] and Calvary seemed the ruin of their hopes. But when the Lord rose from the dead, their hopes were given back to them. More than this, their hopes became certainties. The Father, in declaring the Lord to be indeed the Christ, had declared that He would indeed accomplish all that they had hoped

[1] 1 Pet. i. 4. [2] Luke xxiv. 21.

from Him. No doubt the Apostles, in their love to our Lord, rejoiced in His triumph for His own sake; no doubt they soon came to understand what the gift of His risen life meant for their present time of conflict and sacrifice. All this is part of the joy of Easter. But it is the thought to which St. James gives expression which meant most to the early Church—the thought that the highest hopes we can form are certainties since our Lord has risen, that He Himself has entered upon their fruition, and will return that we ourselves may enter upon their fruition also. Christian patience, Christian endurance, rest upon this Christian certainty. We are not patient because suffering is unavoidable, and impatience makes it worse; nor do we stablish our hearts, because the world is what it is, and we cannot alter it. All that is Stoicism, not Christianity. We Christians are patient because we can look forward to the end of our sufferings; we stablish our hearts because we have only to hold out a while longer and the Lord will come.

II.

But Easter is far more than a proof that the kingdom of God will come; it is itself a revelation of that kingdom, and itself in germ and promise the establishment of that kingdom. "The kingdom of God is not in word but in power";[1] God assures us of its reality by showing it to us already in

[1] 1 Cor. iv. 20.

operation. It was so even in the early life of the Lord. Though the Lord spoke of the kingdom as to come in the future, He spoke of it also as already existing in the present: "If I by the finger of God cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come upon you."[1] In the Lord's works of mercy all might see already at work the powers of the world to come. But far more clearly do we see these powers at work in the Resurrection and in the risen Lord Himself. The Lord's Resurrection was a far fuller revelation of the kingdom of God than His own works of mercy could be, for the life to which it introduced our Lord was the life of the world to come, for which we all are looking. We cannot yet fully understand what the kingdom of God will be, but much that was before unknown the risen Lord has taught us. Think of those words which sound in our ears, whenever we follow the body of a Christian to the grave: "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body."[2] How did St. Paul know all this, and how do we know it? Because the risen Lord Himself was found to have a body of incorruption, glory, and power, a body that was spiritual, in that it was the perfect instrument of His Spirit, and was no more limited by the conditions of earth. On the Easter morning the grave was found empty;

[1] Luke xi. 20. [2] 1 Cor. xv. 42–44.

our Lord had not cast His body aside. But a great change had passed over it, fitting it for the new conditions under which He was now to live. The risen Lord reveals to us a new order of being, dimly and yet certainly—an order of being in which we may be still ourselves, with all that our past experience has made us. He reveals to us that there is no gulf fixed between material existence and the higher form of life for which we are looking: the one can pass into, be taken up into the other. And if that can be so with ourselves, it can be so, for aught we know, with all material things. The coming of the kingdom, the "new heaven" and "new earth" of which the prophet speaks,[1] may not mean the destination of all that we have known and loved here, but their transformation.

> "There shall never be one lost good! . . .
> No beauty, nor good, nor power
> Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist
> When eternity affirms the conception of an hour."[2]

So St. Paul himself seems to have believed. He speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ as fashioning "anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto Himself"; [3] and of "the creation itself" as being "delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God."[4] Let us dwell upon these words—"the working whereby He is able even to subject all

[1] Is. lxv. 17. [2] R. Browning, "Abt.Vogler."
[3] Phil. iii. 2. [4] Rom. viii. 21.

things unto Himself." The risen Lord, we know, is able to transform the souls, the inner life, of all who yield themselves to His influence; we have come to Him for that at the altar to-day. The kingdom of God has begun in our souls already. But it has not yet come in our bodies, or in the world which is our present home. "Though the spirit is life because of righteousness," as yet "the body is dead because of sin,"[1] and the world itself is a hard world of trial and of difficulty. But Easter is the promise that it will not be always so. There is nothing which lies outside the empire of the risen Lord. If He can transform the soul He can transform the body, and the outward scene, and one day He will do so. All will be brought to correspond to the divine purpose.

III.

Brethren, is not all this a message for dark days? Surely there is no message for them like the message of Easter. May we not think that as St. James in after years read the words of St. Paul, the Resurrection came to mean to him even more than it had meant when he wrote his Epistle? How strange it seems to us that a Christian writer should "take for an example of suffering and of patience, the prophets who spake in the name of the Lord!" How more than strange it seems that he should refer to "the patience of Job," and "the end" to which God brought him, as a proof that God "is full of

[1] Rom. viii. 10.

pity and merciful!"[1] Why, we are inclined to say, does he not speak of the Lord's suffering and of the Lord's patience, and of that "end" to which the Father brought the Lord in His Easter victory? Are the Jews not yet Christians still in St. James's mind, or has the full meaning of the Resurrection not yet dawned upon his mind? We certainly to-day shall stop short at no example, and no source of strength, lower than our Lord Himself, and the divine kingdom, which He will one day establish. If our lot is cast in days in which an old world is passing away, and we know not, as we look forward, what the future will bring, we shall remember that the faster events move the sooner will God's purpose be accomplished. There are in the world's history times of slow development, and times of catastrophic change, and both have their place in the fulfilment of God's purpose, but those whose eyes are fixed upon the end like best the days of rapid movement; they "look up, and lift up" their heads, as the Lord taught them to do, "for their redemption draweth nigh."[2] That is what St. James says to us. The early rain has come to us in the Lord's Resurrection; the latter rain will be given to us; the precious fruit of the kingdom will be ours through the coming of the risen Lord; we must be patient—enduring—and stablish our hearts. Do we not in our Christian warfare to-day need just the exhortation so often given to us in our earthly warfare? The struggle has lasted long—far longer than we expected; had we known how long it would be the Church of the Ages might

[1] Ch. v. 10, 11. [2] Luke xxi. 28.

not have had the courage to persevere. But we must persevere now, or we shall lose the fruit of the struggles of the past; there is an end, and, though we ourselves may not live to see it, those that "are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep."[1] We shall live again to share in the kingdom. So we will indeed stablish our hearts, and go forward in our Easter confidence. We will "look to" ourselves, that we "lose not the things which we have wrought, but that" we "receive a full reward."[2] "Ye have need of patience, that, having done the will of God, ye may receive the promise. For yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry. But My righteous one shall live by faith: and if he shrink back, My soul hath no pleasure in him. But we are not of them that shrink back unto perdition; but of them that have faith unto the saving of the soul."[3]

[1] 1 Thess. iv. 15. [2] 2 John 8. [3] Heb. x. 36–39.

SERMON XI.

CHRISTIAN PRAYER.

JAMES V. 13–16.

"Is any among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, it shall be forgiven him. Confess therefore your sins one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working."

WE have reached the last subject with which St. James deals. It is the power of prayer. Use it at all times, he says—in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, in good days and in dark days. Bring your whole life into touch with God. Prayer has a power to which no limit can be set. It can affect the individual Christian and it can affect the world at large. "Elijah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again; and the heaven gave rain and the earth brought forth her fruit."

I.

Now it is of this imperial power that we will

think to-day. All of us believe in it, but how the weapon rusts in our hands.[1] Our failure is not all due to the double mind, though that, as we have seen, has much to do with our failure. The "native hue of" our "resolution" to pray is "sickled o'er with the pale cast of" a thought, which would have been to St. James unintelligible. What is this thought? Let us bring it out into the day. It is that prayer—by the very constitution of the world—can only be effective in the region of the soul's life. We may pray for "spiritual" blessings, and hope for our answer; we may pray for forgiveness, and grace, and guidance, and the love of God; but we must not, if we wish to be regarded as intelligent beings, go beyond this. We must not pray for health, or for rain, or for anything which belongs to the system of the material world, since the material world is a fixed and immutable system, which follows its own laws, and our prayers cannot interfere with them. Now, I think that, if we had propounded such a view to St. James, we should have been hard put to it to explain to him what we meant. But, even though we had succeeded in making our meaning clear, I am quite certain that he would have rejected such a view with contumely. Not only would he have seen that the whole witness of Scripture was against it, but he would have seen it to be inconsistent with that knowledge of God, which His people had learnt from their experience in the past. St. James was, of course, quite aware that the world is an orderly system. "By

[1] Ch. v. 17, 18.

measure, and number, and weight" God has ordered "all things,"[1] and "while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease,"[2] But, though the world is thus ordered, it is God Himself Who has ordered it, and it depends simply upon His will. If the order of the world allows us to act with freedom within it, much more must it leave place for that sovereign freedom of God, to which prayer makes its appeal. So St. James would have answered, though doubtless in the language of his own day, not in that of ours. But to ourselves this strange mid-Victorian view of prayer ought to seem even more irrational, for we know, as St. James did not, how intimate is the connection between the soul and the body. Can anyone suppose to-day that God bestows "spiritual" blessings upon us, and yet leaves the material world unaffected? If God gives to us spiritual strength and illumination, we may be quite sure that a change has taken place in the grey matter of the brain. What then becomes of the view that the material world is a closed system, with which nothing can interfere? God is in touch with the material as with the spiritual world, and has His own ways of making it serve His purpose. We may then at once dismiss this irrational distinction between one kind of prayer and another. If we are justified in believing in prayer at all, we are justified in believing in a prayer, whose scope is as wide as the universe.

[1] Wisd. xi. 20. [2] Gen. viii. 22.

II.

Is there then no limitation? Has God abdicated in our favour His rule over the world, leaving us, through the power of our prayers, to do with it as we will? St. James was very far from believing this. It is "the supplication of a righteous man" —and of him only—which "availeth much in its working"; the Jews of St. James's day asked and received not, because they asked amiss, that they might spend it on their lusts.[1] Effectual prayer is the expression of a mind set upon the accomplishment of the will of God. Like every power of the Spirit of God, it "can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth."[2] That is what we must ever remember. The power of our prayer does not depend upon the earnestness of our prayer, if by earnestness we mean the intensity of our longing that our prayer should be answered. We may intensely long for things which would be for our ruin. The power of our prayer depends upon our power to discern, and to seek, what the fulfilment of God's purpose requires. That does not mean that prayer is no more than a conscious and reverent acquiescence in what the will of God may prove to be. God's purposes have to be fulfilled through our co-operation with Him, and there are graces and gifts of all kinds required for their fulfilment, which wait for our prayers to discern, and seek, and claim them. There is room, as our Lord taught us, for importunity, and the deepest earnestness of the right kind. But it

[1] Ch. iv. 3. [2] 2 Cor. xiii. 8.

does mean that selfish ends are inconsistent with power in prayer. The belief that we can pray for one kind of blessing with success, but not for another, is a belief very well founded. But the distinction that we draw must be the right one. What is of importance is not so much the nature of the things we ask as the nature of our purpose in asking them. How was it with the prayer of Elijah? Nothing could well be more material than the drought and the rain for which he prayed. But he prayed for the drought that the people might be brought to repentance, and for rain that they might know that their repentance was accepted. It was precisely because his spiritual vision enabled him to discern what the purpose of God required, that he was able by his prayers to forward that purpose. Suppose that the rich men of St. James's day who "kept back by fraud"[1] the wages of their labourers, had prayed for a drought in Syria to hinder the Roman preparations for invasion, or for rain in their own country, that their profits from agriculture might be the larger, of what use would such prayers have been? Nay! more. Suppose that, without any change in the spirit of their prayers, their prayers had been devoted to ends beyond the present world; suppose that they had prayed, as probably they did pray, for Gehenna for the Roman legionaries, and Paradise for themselves, would the rough Roman soldiers have had any reason to be alarmed, or they themselves have had any reason to hope, that their prospects in the next world had in any way been improved? Certainly not. It is,

[1] Ch. v. 4.

you see, the purpose of the prayer that matters—its conformity with the will of God—and not in the least the particular sphere in which the answer is sought; and so our Lord taught us. When He wished to impress upon us the power of prayer, He chose the most solidly material object that He could find—He chose a mountain, and connected His teaching with that. "Have faith in God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he saith cometh to pass; he shall have it. Therefore I say unto you, All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them."[1] Did He mean what He said? Certainly He did. Suppose that St. Paul had known himself summoned by "the Spirit of Jesus"[2] to preach the gospel to some tribe of men beyond a range of mountains, could he have asked in faith that the mountains should be cast into the sea? Certainly, had there been no other way of reaching his destination. Doubtless, mountains fulfil God's purpose best when they remain where He has placed them, and not when they fly through space to the destruction of mariners passing "on the seas upon their lawful occasions"; doubtless, also, St. Paul's own perfecting was best forwarded by his crossing mountains "in perils of robbers, in labour and travail, in watchings often, in cold and nakedness."[3] But those who really believe in God must find the ultimate reason for the stability of mountains

[1] Mark. xi. 22-24. [2] Cf. Acts xvi. 6-10. [3] 2 Cor. xi. 26 27.

in spiritual considerations, and not in those which are purely material. When Wordsworth said in his "Ode to Duty":

> "Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong;
> And the most ancient heavens, through Thee are fresh and strong,"

he gave noble expression to this truth. The ultimate reason why the stars remain in their courses is that they best fulfil God's purpose by so remaining. If wise Christians to-day do not pray for the removal of mountains, it is not from want of faith, but from the presence of it, from the reality of their discernment of the mind of God. "Be ye not foolish"—the words are as true of prayer as of action—"but understand what the will of the Lord is."[1]

III.

And now let us apply all this to that subject of spiritual healing, in which many of us take so deep an interest to-day. The question is up to a certain point entirely simple. God can heal the body as easily as the soul; and bodily health, if it is desired for the fulfilment of God's purpose, is an absolutely right subject for prayer. St. James says exactly what we should expect him to say. Illness is something abnormal in the Christian Church; its presence, St. James evidently thinks, suggests sin behind. What then is to be done? Let the sick man "call for the elders of the Church."

[1] Eph. v. 17.

The Church is a brotherhood; the blessing needed by one is a blessing for all, and the Church should seek it through its appointed leaders. They should come; they should use the appropriate sacramental means; they should pray over the sick man, and invoke the name of the Great Healer. The prayer of faith will then save him that is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. "If he have committed sins"—the next verse presupposes that they have been confessed—"it shall be forgiven him." If the sickness is a punishment, the sin must be abandoned, if the punishment is to be removed. Now what could be simpler or more straightforward than all this? Of course, there may be exceptions. The sickness may be in some way for the glory of God. We read that St. Paul "besought the Lord thrice"[1] for the removal of his thorn in the flesh, and had to learn that for God's good purposes it must remain. Having learned that, he would not have wished it to be removed. But, normally, the procedure of St. James is plainly the right method of Christian action; St. Paul himself did not cease to pray for his own deliverance till a fuller discernment of the mind of God was given to him. Ought we, then, to-day, to follow out St. James's teaching? Certainly, when the conditions are the same, and those who do as he bids us assure us of the blessing that follows. Only, let us be sure that the conditions are fulfilled. The Christian Churches of St. James's day had many faults, but they were assemblies of believers. Their members were men

[1] 2 Cor. xii. 8.

and women, who had come out from the world to live for the divine kingdom. St. James says: "Is any among you sick?" and we must not forget the limitation which the word "you" involves. The subject of healing is a Christian man, who has confessed and renounced his sin, not one who desires health that he may spend it upon his pleasures. Were we to preach upon the housetops the power of holy unction, there would doubtless be many who would be ready to give it a trial, in just the same spirit as they try a new drug. But we could not expect healing to follow, and the failure would be injurious to faith. We must create the conditions first in faithful sick people and in faithful elders of the Church. Then—and not till then—may we ask and receive, that our joy may be full.[1]

[1] John xvi. 24.

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